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Inescapable Choice:
Wallace Stevens's New Romanticism and English Romantic Poetry

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Noriko Tomioka

A thesis submitted to the University of Durham
in accordance with the regulations for
admittance to the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English Studies
University of Durham
September 2006

17 APR 2007

To my mother

Out of this same light, out of the central mind,

We make a dwelling in the evening air,

In which being there together is enough.

– Wallace Stevens, *Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour*

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how Stevens creates a new Romanticism. It argues that Stevens demonstrates a double view of Romanticism as having positive and negative aspects and it relates discussion of this double view to the development of his poetry and theories of poetry. Stevens shares with the Romantics the belief that through the power of imagination the problem of dualism – especially the split between art and existential reality – can be solved. From Stevens's perspective, thinking about what should be respected and what should be corrected in Romanticism provides grounds for the creation of his own new Romanticism. In chapters one and two, by examining the conflict between imagination and reality in the works of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, I explore the intertextual relations between Stevens and the Romantics from a perspective informed by the implications of Stevens's work and thought. In chapters three and four, focusing on Stevens's treatment of the relation between imagination and reality, I examine the nuanced differences between his work and that of the Romantics. Chapter five provides a prologue to 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction', the culmination of Stevens's concern with imagination and reality. In the final chapter I examine how Stevens's new Romanticism, especially its emphasis on the imagination's activity, is concretised in 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction'. I also explore how the later development of his sense of reality affects his poetic creativity. By examining the influence of the Romantics on Stevens and his response to them, the nature of his poetry can be more accurately understood. Throughout the thesis, I engage, as appropriate, with the work of many critics who have written on Stevens. It is my hope that my own approach gives a fully considered and detailed account of a topic often addressed more briefly by other commentators.

The research presented in this thesis is the original work of the author, unless stated otherwise. None of this work has been submitted for a degree in this or any other university.

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Contents

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Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate what Wallace Stevens desires for modern poetry. It does so by re-exploring his response to the work and ideas of the English Romantics. It argues that Stevens can be regarded as the most authentic successor of Romanticism. Romanticism is transformed in Stevens's poetry as he creates his own new Romanticism. We can find between Stevens and the Romantic poets a similarity in their view of the function of poetic imagination and the use of poetry. Stevens, like the Romantics, believes in the power of imagination to dissolve the boundary between what is imagined and reality. However, admitting the synthetic power of the imagination, Stevens takes a different stance from the Romantics since their use of imagination (from his perspective) tends to result in a divorce of imagination from reality. Since he values the Romantic imagination, Stevens tries to rescue it from the problem of solipsism. To clarify what Stevens's new Romanticism is, it is helpful to find his response to his predecessors and trace the development of his imagination.

Stevens's response to Romanticism has been explored by many critics in the course of discussing the Romantic influence on Stevens and Stevens as a successor of Romanticism. M. H. Abrams remarks: 'Among modern poets none stays so close to some of Wordsworth's formulations as Stevens does' in that Stevens as well as Wordsworth shows 'the Romantic endeavor to salvage traditional experience and values by accommodating them to premises tenable to a later age'. Abrams suggests that 'within the altered frame and tone of Stevens' meditations there remains a notable continuity with Wordsworth'.[1] Harold Bloom and Helen Vendler also observe a similarity in the function of poetic imagination and the use of poetry between Stevens and Wordsworth.[2] Stevens's response to other

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[1] M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: Norton, 1971) 69.

[2] According to Bloom, the vision that Wordsworth describes in 'simple' and 'common' words, hallowing the common place, provides us with the perpetually renewed life. 'This vision is renewed for us in the poetry of Wallace Stevens, the most authentic and relevant I think of our time'. Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry

Romantic poets has also been examined. Vendler, focusing her discussion on Keats's 'To Autumn', explores Keats's influence on Stevens and asserts: 'Throughout his long life as a poet, Stevens returned again and again to Keats' ode "To Autumn"'.[3] Whereas the Romantic influence on Stevens is examined by many critics, the formation of his new Romanticism has not been subjected to such scrutiny, even though most critics give a brief account of his new Romanticism.

The English Romantics explore the possibility of imaginative reconciliation between human beings and nature, and indeed, if one were to select a central characteristic of Romanticism, it would be the importance which they attached to the imagination, an importance evident in their practice and their theories. However, the Romantic search for reconciliation between man and nature tends to be unsuccessful. According to Stevens, judging from his practice and his theoretical comments, the Romantics fail when the imagination is found wanting in the face of the ever-changing nature of reality. The problem is twofold. First, the defeat of the imagination by reality shows the problem of sustaining a visionary world. What emerges from reflection on the defeat of the imagination is awareness of the need to sustain the vitality of the imagination in relation to reality. Again, when the imagination becomes overpowering, losing its balance with reality, the problem of the imagination's usurpation of reality arises. Then the poetic achievement ends with a solipsistic immersion in the imagination. In both cases – the imagination's defeat by reality or the imagination's usurpation of reality – what is missing is any contact of the imagination with reality. Secondly, Romantic poetry faces an artistic problem when such a loss of contact occurs. Then, so Stevens argues, nothing can be produced but stale modes of perception and thought. For the Romantic poets, there is often a problem occurring in the mismatch between what they perceive through the imagination and the

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(1961; rev. and enlarged edn. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1971) xxiv-xxv. Vendler mentions that Stevens's 'articulation of thought is not (though it may at first look as if it were) Wordsworthian meditation. It is, in fact, utterly unlike Wordsworth'. Helen Vendler, The Music of What Happens (Cambridge, Mass.: London: Harvard UP, 1988) 90.

[3] Helen Vendler, 'Stevens and Keats' "To Autumn" in Wallace Stevens: A Celebration ed. Frank Doggett and Robert Buttel (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 171.

embodiment of their perception in poetry.

Stevens seeks to create a new Romanticism that will solve the problems which he sees as ensnaring the Romantics. Poetry loses its vitality and freshness when the imagination that conceives it adheres to what is not real. The crucially important need for poetry is the adherence of the imagination to reality. Like the Romantics (and here the positive nature of their legacy for Stevens is apparent), Stevens regards reality not as static but as dynamic. To correspond with reality and the process of becoming, the imagination needs to be energetic enough not to be absorbed by reality. The imagination needs to return again and again to reality for a fresh beginning. To ensure that imagination's activity is ever-fresh as it confronts ever-changing reality, the imagination needs to be capable of a self-renewing, cyclic activity. Poetic techniques which are essential for the imagination to return to perception and begin a new poetic creativity are explored by Stevens to realise his new Romanticism.

My approach in this thesis blends close reading, a device which allows for sympathetic yet critical responsiveness, and literary history. My attention to the text takes its cue from Stevens and the Romantics, poets who regard their poetry as a sensuously concrete, autonomous artefact. For them, a poem is the product of the imagination's attempt to approach or recreate the real in verbal art. Thus, Romantic poetry continues to be hospitable to approaches associated with New Criticism – as does Stevens's work, with its attention to the possibility of 'pure poetry'. However, following New Criticism as the only desirable approach neglects historical aspects, biographical issues and intertextuality. It is also true that, owing to the failure in the achievement of the reconciliation between the inner and outer worlds and the inability of the words to represent the experience of the imagination, the epistemology of Romanticism is haunted by problems which invite deconstruction. But the Romantic poets, acknowledging the limits of the imagination and words to capture what they envision, often deconstruct their own writing before they are deconstructed. My use of 'deconstruction' frequently emphasises this poetic self-awareness, and this thesis is not written from a

deconstructionist perspective. Rather, it favours attentive reading of the poetry in the light of larger aesthetic, historical and biographical concerns.

To develop my arguments about Stevens's new Romanticism, it is also helpful to consult the responses of Stevens's critics to his Romantic inheritance as well as their examination of what makes Stevens a modern. Lucy Beckett in her study, Wallace Stevens (1974),[4] discusses Stevens's relationship with Romantic ideas of imagination. She indicates the similarity between Stevens and the Romantics, both of whom believe in a connection between poetry and belief, and explore the relationship between the creative imagination and the world it illuminates and recreates. Beckett casts valuable light on how the replacement of religion by poetry works in Stevens's poetry. George Bornstein in Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens (1976)[5] investigates the development of Romantic tradition in modern poetry, illustrating how Romanticism is transformed by Yeats, Eliot and Stevens. Bornstein shows that Stevens does not simply repeat or reject Romanticism, but transforms it. Stevens's own transformation of Romanticism involves as a poetic strategy for his new Romanticism a notion of provisional creativity, one in which ongoing process replaces a finished product in a continuous poetic quest. And his provisionality works to prevent a poetic product from becoming a stale representation.

Tilottama Rajan's Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism (1980)[6] and Anne K. Mellor's English Romantic Irony (1980)[7] show the darker side of Romanticism, negating a naïve acceptance of the reconciliation between imagination and reality. Rajan, through deconstruction, reveals the epistemological problem in Romanticism. Rajan's reading of the Romantics in the light of deconstructive criticism corresponds with Mellor's reading of the Romantic

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[4] Lucy Beckett, Wallace Stevens (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1974).
[5] George Bornstein, Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1976).
[6] Tilottama Rajan, Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism (Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1980).
[7] Anne K. Mellor, English Romantic Irony (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1980).

conflict in the chaotic universe as an infinite process of becoming. According to Mellor, the Romantic deconstructs his own text in the expectation that such deconstruction is a way of keeping in contact with the ever-changing reality. She argues that a literary mode for the Romantic is a form that creates and decreates itself which becomes an analogue for life itself. This artistic mode is also applied by Stevens to his new Romanticism.

Albert Gelpi's A Coherent Splendor: The American Poetic Renaissance, 1910-1950 (1987)[8] looks at the relationship between Romanticism and modernism. According to Gelpi, what makes modernism different from Romanticism is that the modernists seek the unity of imagination and reality in the artwork itself. Gelpi's argument assists in an understanding of Stevens's thoughts about 'pure poetry'. And Frank Doggett's explanation of fiction as the mind's reality[9] enables me to understand how Stevens's poetic principle lies in artwork itself, revealing his value of 'pure poetry'. Michael O'Neill in Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem (1997)[10] reveals the Romantics to be anxious about, as well as celebratory of, the power of poetry, and shows the Romantic inheritance at work in post-Romantic poets such as Yeats and Stevens. My particular addition to the perceptions of these critics is to emphasise through detailed readings the fictive complexity at the heart of Stevens's 'new Romanticism'.

In addition to these critical works, numerous attempts have been made by critics to interpret Stevens's poetical works. Eleanor Cook's close reading of Stevens in Poetry, Word-Play, and Word-War in Wallace Stevens (1988)[11] enables a fuller grasp of the playfulness and inventiveness of Stevens's language. Helen Vendler's critical works which show the Romantic influence, especially Keats's, on

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[8] Albert Gelpi, A Coherent Splendor: The American Poetic Renaissance, 1910-1950 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987).
[9] Frank Doggett, Stevens' Poetry of Thought (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins, P, 1966) 200.
[10] Michael O'Neill, Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).
[11] Eleanor Cook, Poetry, Word-Play, and Word-War in Wallace Stevens (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988).

Stevens, help in understanding the nature of Stevens's poetics.[12] Frank Kermode[13] and Joseph N. Riddel[14] provide many detailed interpretations of individual poems. The indications and suggestions by these critics have informed my ideas on Stevens's new Romanticism and helped me to construct my arguments about it.

My first two chapters begin with the analysis of the problems of the Romantics and Stevens's response to them. I address Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats in these chapters, especially their concern with the conflict between imagination and reality. The first chapter explores achievement and failure in Coleridge and Wordsworth, that is, 'achievement' and 'failure' as seen from the perspective of Stevens's view of Romanticism. Though Coleridge's desire for the reconciliation between human beings and nature through imagination is articulated in his theory of the imagination in Biographia Literaria, the problem is how far Coleridge could have realised his desire. Coleridge, who is conscious of the limits of the imagination in responding to reality, tries to protect his visionary world and feels a sense of guilt in so doing. Coleridge's poetic intelligence about the difficulty in realising reconciliation reveals some aspects of failure in Romanticism. The difficulty of the reconciliation is also illustrated by Wordsworth. The balance between the imagination and reality is influenced by the poet's ambiguous attitude towards reality. The problem of the imagination's usurpation of reality or the imagination's defeat by reality arises when he fails to confront reality as it is. The difficulty in balancing imagination and reality also inhibits the poet from accomplishing his wish to retrieve the vision owned in his childhood. Wordsworth's visionary world tends to be realised in a solipsistic immersion gained through the imagination divorced from reality

After Coleridge and Wordsworth, in the second chapter I will move on to the next generation, Shelley and Keats. Stevens is also attracted to these poets.

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[12] Vendler, 'Stevens and Keats' "To Autumn"' in Wallace Stevens: A Celebration 171-95.
[13] Frank Kermode, Wallace Stevens (New York: Chip's Bookshop, 1979).
[14] Joseph N. Riddel, The Clairvoyant Eye: The Poetry and Poetics of Wallace Stevens (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1965).

Stevens shares with Shelley the idea that through poetry it is possible to embody what the mind envisions. And both of them are conscious of the difficulty of incarnating in verbal art what the imagination seizes. However, Stevens cannot support Shelley's metaphysical vision, a vision of what Shelley sees as poetic truth. The essential conditions proposed by Stevens are the adherence of the poetic imagination to reality and how to represent living images in language. By taking advantage of Shelley's failure in solving these artistic problems, Stevens explores his own way of representing the object he imagines. Stevens feels sympathetic to Keats's aesthetics, his trust in reality without needing the support of metaphysical vision, and returns to 'To Autumn' as to his poetic home. As I mentioned before, 'To Autumn' becomes a guiding principle for Stevens's poetry. To understand how Keats's aesthetics culminates in this ode and to find out how Stevens is influenced by the ode, we need to trace the formation of Keats's aesthetics as well as the development of the imagination. I examine closely what poetic principle is at work in the ode and how it emerges from Keats's other major poetical works.

The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens consists of Harmonium (1923), Ideas of Order (1935), The Man with the Blue Guitar (1937), Parts of a World (1942), Transport to Summer (1947), The Auroras of Autumn (1950) and The Rock (1954). Each work seeks to offer itself as part of an organic whole: from the celebratory tone of Harmonium, Stevens's poetic creation culminates in Transport to Summer; it then mimics a 'waning' in The Auroras of Autumn before reaching the last phase in The Rock where Stevens imagines a new cycle of the imagination. Since the cyclical nature of poetic creation becomes a driving force in the creation of his new Romanticism, to trace the development of the imagination, in the following chapters I treat the four volumes in chronological order of publication.

In Chapters 3 and 4 my argument covers two main subjects, the interdependent relationships between imagination and reality, and what Stevens desires as a new Romanticism, both of which are demonstrated well in Harmonium. Stevens's experimental attempt at creating a new Romanticism develops from the theme of how imagination and reality depend on each other. In

Chapter 3, focusing on the arguments about Stevens's idea about the relationship between the imagination and reality, I reveal how the two terms relate to each other and the problems brought about by the tense and unstable relation between them. Chapter 4 aims to extend the observations about the interdependence between the imagination and reality into Stevens's new Romanticism. What makes his poetry a new Romanticism has to do with several aspects. Among these is the idea of the fiction as a substitute for reality, an idea which characterises his poetry as modern. Stevens puts a poetic value on fiction created by the union of the imagination and reality. Stevens parts company with the Romantics, in that his idea of fiction does not look for any metaphysical grounding. But the poetic experience offered by the fiction can be compared to a religious one since it works to redeem life. Concentrating our attention on Stevens's idea of fiction in connection with the interdependence between the imagination and reality, I shall examine how his poetry develops into a new Romanticism.

'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction' (1942) is the work in which Stevens's imagination culminates. Before reading this poem, it is necessary to examine the development of his imagination. While confidence in the imagination is witnessed in Harmonium, a loss of confidence under the pressure of reality is apparent, showing Stevens's struggle to create his new Romanticism. Stevens who values the complex relationship between imagination and reality explores the possibility of creating a fiction to overcome the conflict of the two terms. In Chapter 5, tracing the progress of Stevens's poetic creativity, I shall examine how Stevens develops a literary mode which is congruent with his new Romanticism. I develop my discussion so that this chapter will serve as a prologue to 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction'.

In the final chapter I discuss how Stevens's new Romanticism is concretised in 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction'. Then, after the culmination of the activity of imagination in the poem, I explore how the development of his sense of reality affects his poetic creativity in his last phase. Stevens's poetic activity has a cyclic nature that traces how from the birth of poetry, the imagination develops to

culminate in a harmonious union with reality and then returns to reality for a new poetic activity. The cycle of poetic activity is repeated endlessly like the cycle of the seasons. The dynamic nature of his poetry lies in an unending process of poetic activity by which poetry is kept fresh and living. This poetic strategy becomes the prime mover of Stevens's new Romanticism.

Stevens inherits Romanticism and values the matrix of poetic thought about the imagination that underlies Romantic poetry. By investigating how the Romantic is incorporated into Stevens's poetry, we can trace the formation of his new Romanticism and reveal his theory of poetry. My thesis, thus, contributes to the ongoing study of the relationship between English Romantic poetry and twentieth-century American poetry.

Chapter 1: Stevens's Response to Romanticism: Coleridge and Wordsworth

The problems which troubled the Romantics arise from their attempts to reconcile their inner vision and the outer world through the creative power of the poetic imagination. As some influential critics indicate, the Romantics were conscious that human beings had separated from nature and felt cut off from the world about them. Abrams succinctly describes the project and the limits of Romanticism in The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (1953) as follows:

> It was at the same time an attempt to overcome the sense of man's alienation from the world by healing the cleavage between subject and object, . . . To establish that man shares his own life with nature was to reanimate the dead universe of the materialists, and at the same time most effectively to tie man back into his milieu.[1]

The Romantics create poetical works out of their belief in the power of imagination by which they seek to reconcile or synthesise what is divided, opposed and conflicting. In Natural Supernaturalism Abrams developed his discussion of Romanticism by applying the paradigm of a self-educative journey towards the reunion of the isolated self with nature. To attain a reconciliation of subject with object or reunion of the mind with nature is, according to Abrams, the desire of the Romantics and originates from a secular theodicy. Feeling a poetic rather than Christian vocation, the Romantics developed their characteristic concepts and patterns into religious ideas founded on secular premises. They tried to recreate the external world by imaginatively reactivating the perceptive process so that the false separation of the mind and nature can be undone. The employment of the imagination in this way can be – and, indeed, was by Coleridge and Shelley – compared to God's act of Creation. Partly because of their sometimes ambivalent

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[1] M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1953) 65.

trust in the imagination the Romantics developed their own ways of understanding reality, ways that are often at odds with orthodox Christianity.

If the desire for reconciliation is a central aspect of Romanticism, the darker side of the movement emerges when that desire cannot be realised. Abrams's emphasis on the marriage between mind and nature provokes the question of the validity of his account. It is doubtful whether we can summarise Romanticism by applying the paradigm of a self-educative journey by a poet towards the reunion of the isolated self with nature. The problem is whether the Romantics could really attain reconciliation, or whether they fell into an illusory state in the sense that they created imaginative worlds completely isolated from reality. In turn, the possibility that they indulged in illusory imaginings raises the problem of solipsism.

This problem also invites us to consider an associated linguistic problem. Rajan argues that, though Abrams considers the darker side of Romanticism, he fails to recognise that 'the darker elements in Romantic works are not a part of their organic unity, but rather threaten to collapse this unity'.[2] By applying methods drawn from deconstruction, Rajan seeks to reveal the collapse of organic unity. To put this issue in other terms, Rajan shows that Romantic literature raises the problem of logocentrism. The Romantic concern with the gap between imagination and reality throws up the problem of logocentrism. Jacques Derrida, in his classic work Of Grammatology, presents 'logocentrism' as the longing for the logos as centre. According to him, this centering principle governs the western tradition of thought. Logocentrism comes from 'logos', the Greek word that means word, but also carries implications of the divine mind, as the Fourth Gospel in the New Testament begins with 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'. From this view of logocentrism, the Logos as the Word of God lies behind and before language as the only autonomous and self-sufficient being. The problem is that the God-Word precedes and ever eludes the clutch of words.

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[2] Rajan 19.

The Romantics themselves recognise the inevitable gap between sign and referent. Rajan develops a flexible argument about logocentrism, using deconstruction in her argument. According to her, Derrida's linguistic approach, preoccupied with the search for disruptive elements in textuality, fails to read logocentric poetry accurately in cases where the poetry's logocentrism is self-consciously treated.[3] Furthermore the deconstructive method cannot be effective when the Romantics themselves recognise the limits of representing what they imagine and try to come to terms with the function of imagination in relation to external reality. They believed in the power of the imagination to envision the unreal and the possible across the boundary between the visionary world and the actual. The products of imagination represent an absolute for poets, who rarely concede openly that what they invent is unreal. But, as Rajan argues, 'implicit in this belief that the mind can create the unreal must be a doubt as to the reality of a mental creation'.[4] And this problem of Romantic epistemology cannot be restricted to deconstructive critics since it is experienced and discussed by the Romantics

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[3] It may be useful to quote Rajan's summary of deconstruction to elucidate logocentrism in Romanticism.

> The logocentric tradition assumes that language has the capacity to "make present" the truth which it "re-presents" through linguistic signs, and that this direct correspondence between the signifier and the thing signified is guaranteed either by some transcendent source or (as in Romanticism) by the true voice of feeling. In a literary sense, it is thus possible to speak of a logocentric *poetics of presence*, which assumes that literature can make present that which it signifies, can make real that which it imagines. In contrast, Derrida argues that language is a product of *différance*, and cannot be viewed logocentrically: the prime characteristic of language is that the signifier does not make present the thing signified, and that words are thus the *deferral* rather than the communication of a truth which they indicate but simultaneously undermine. In a literary sense, the consequence of Derrida's view of language would be a *poetics of absence*, in which the text would be a perpetual contesting and canceling of its own meaning, and hence a projection of its own nothingness. . . .

And then Rajan indicates the limit of deconstructive method which cannot be applied to all texts.

> Derrida's use of a deconstructive method of criticism arises from his general characterization of language as *différance* rather than *logos*; I make no such assumptions about the structure of language, and hence do not see deconstruction as a method valid with reference to all texts. Self-contestation is not an inherent feature of literary works, and deconstruction is a critical procedure applicable only to those texts which do contest their own meaning. There are, in other words, logocentric poems, although they do not fall within the range of this study. (17n)

[4] Rajan 13.

themselves.

Romantic idealism is based on a belief in the transforming power of artistic activity to represent through language what the mind envisions. By reactivating creative perception, the Romantics try to reconcile human beings with nature. This attempt led to an attempt to find a living language in Nature. But in this movement towards reconciliation the contradictory relation of the imagination and the real becomes apparent. The Romantics try to recapture images for the mind's desires and to permeate their words with the true voice of feeling. However, it is difficult for them to make present the transcendental signified through linguistic signs. The nostalgic lament for the loss of presence haunts the Romantics. Shelley laments the inevitable corruption of the ideal in the process of incarnation in A Defence of Poetry: 'when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conception of the poet'. Shelley's quest for the unattainable is born out of this sense of irrecoverable inspiration. His poems play many variations on this theme. In 'Kubla Khan' Coleridge fails to revive a visionary dream in language. Wordsworth in 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' also deplores the disappearance of 'the visionary gleam . . . the glory and the dream' (56-57). The search for poetic truth, the romantic quest for the presence they desire, is a strong impulse in Romantic literature.

The Romantics experienced the difficulty of embodying the union of the imagination and external reality in poetry, because logocentrism assumes that what the poet seizes through the imagination as the true voice of feeling is closer to an original thought than a written word which undermines pure thought. This difficulty can result in an element of disunified and contradictory structure. Rajan explains the contradiction, saying that 'at certain critical points the Romantics deconstruct their own affirmative postulates'. In other words, the subtext which shadows the text's coherence enables us to reveal 'the author's subconscious awareness of or commitment to a system of assumptions opposite to the one he

explicitly endorses'.[5] The possibility of a solution to the Romantic dilemma depends on whether poetic language can achieve a reconciliation between perception and artistic form. Therefore we can say that logocentrism pertains to Romantic epistemology. And Romantic poetry can be an open invitation to deconstruction, as is indicated by Raman Selden who writes: 'Indeed de Man argues that the Romantics actually deconstruct their own writing by showing that the presence they desire is always absent, always in the past or future'.[6] Without detailed recourse to the deconstructive method to read logocentric poems in Romanticism, we can see that many of the Romantics consciously deconstruct their own writing by showing the gap which cannot be filled before they are deconstructed. They are alert to the presence of conflicting strains in their poems, often making an aesthetic virtue out of such an awareness.

In 'Symbolism' in Literary Criticism: A Short History, Cleanth Brooks suggests that the stream of Romanticism flows into American poetry. According to Brooks, 'The doctrine that words create knowledge is a part of the romantic theory of the imagination'. This doctrine can be found at work in later American as much as in Romantic poets. To trace the development we must go back to Coleridge's 'speculations upon poetry as a way of mediating between the subject and the object' which shows an example of Romantic epistemology. Against 'the old antithesis of Words and Things', Coleridge elevates words to the status of living things that have the power to reflect some kind of reality: 'I would endeavour to destroy the old antithesis of Words and Things; elevating, as it were, Words into Things and living things too'.[7] The response to Coleridge's literary theory varies as

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[5] Rajan 16.

[6] Raman Selden, A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory, rev. ed. Peter Widdowson, 3rd ed. (Kentucky: The UP of Kentucky, 1993) 150.

[7] Illustrating Coleridge as an example of Romantic epistemology, Brooks develops his arguments: 'The doctrine that words create knowledge is a part of the romantic theory of the imagination. Coleridge, for example, constantly verges upon such a conception in his speculations upon poetry as a way of mediating between the subject and the object'. (584) Then Brooks quotes Coleridge's letter to William Godwin dated 22 September 1800 to show his 'speculations upon poetry as a way of mediating between the subject and the object': 'I wish you to write a book on the power of the words. . . . is *Thinking* impossible without arbitrary signs? And how far is the word "arbitrary" a misnomer? Are not words,

Brooks mentions: 'Indeed, the tendency to treat words as things has in our time gone so far as to provoke vehement reactions'. For example, according to Brooks, Allen Tate denounced the

> belief that language itself can be reality, or by incantation can create a reality: a superstition that comes down in French from Lautréamont, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé to the Surrealists, and in English to Hart Crane, Wallace Stevens, and Dylan Thomas.

Brooks continues,

> In Tate's list, the preponderance of French and American names is significant. Though Coleridge prophetically raised the right questions and even implied some of the answers later to be proposed by the symbolist theoreticians, the most direct line of development does lead through French and American thinkers. Coleridge's American followers, more nearly than his English, entered into direct engagement with the problem of symbolic form.[8]

What the passages make clear is not only the problem of the justification of words as things but also the influence of Romantic epistemology on American poets. Gelpi indicates that 'symbolism can be seen as signaling the disintegration of the Romantic epistemology into Modernism; and Imagism, as signaling the effort within Modernism to recover something of the Romantic epistemology'.[9] The Romantics' struggles with the problem of reconciliation between the art of imaginative creativity and existential reality were taken over by the Symbolists

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etc., parts and germinations of the plant? And what is the law of their growth? In something of this sort I would endeavour to destroy the old antithesis of Words and Things; elevating, as it were, Words into Things and living things too.' (584) According to Brooks, the quoted letter is from Unpublished Letters of S. T. Coleridge, ed. E. L. Griggs (London, 1932), I, 155-6. Brooks also indicates, 'A few years later Lord Byron voiced much the same aspiration in his *Childe Harold.* (584n): "I do believe, / Though I have found them not, that there may be / Words which are things"'. (Canto III, stanza CXIV) William K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Cleanth Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History, vol. 2 (Chicago and London: Midway Reprint – The U of Chicago P, 1957) 584.

[8] Brooks 584-85. Brooks quotes Allen Tate's The Forlorn Demon: Didactic and Critical Essays (Chicago: Regnery, 1953) 61.

[9] Gelpi 5.

and Imagists when they experimented with new forms and content.

Furthermore Wallace Stevens, unlike the Romantics, who do not openly admit that imaginative creation can access the physical reality of things, seeks, through fiction, an identity between reality and artistic creation. He goes beyond the Romantics by acknowledging the unreal as what is not real and seeks to rescue the poetic imagination from problems bequeathed by Romanticism. He asserts the authenticity of the imagination in 'Imagination as Value' in The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination (1951) as follows:

> The imagination is one of the great human powers. The romantic belittles it. The imagination is the liberty of the mind. The romantic is a failure to make use of that liberty. It is to the imagination what sentimentality is to feeling. It is a failure of the imagination precisely as sentimentality is a failure of feeling. The imagination is the only genius. It is intrepid and eager and the extreme of its achievement lies in abstraction. The achievement of the romantic, on the contrary, lies in minor wish-fulfillments and it is incapable of abstraction.[10]

Having a similar view to the Romantics in that he places a high value on the imagination, Stevens reveals to us his own definition of a new Romanticism by indicating the faults of the Romantics. To clarify what Stevens means by the 'romantic' it will be helpful to quote his explanation of it from his 'Adagia' alongside the letter of 1935 written after 'The Idea of Order at Key West' (1934).

> It should be said of poetry that it is essentially romantic as if one were recognizing the truth about poetry for the first time. Although the romantic is referred to, most often, in a pejorative sense, this sense attaches, or should attach, not to the romantic in general but to some phase of the romantic that has become stale. Just as there is always a romantic that is potent, so there is always a romantic that is impotent.[11]

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[10] Wallace Stevens, The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination (New York: Knopf, 1951) 138-39.

[11] Wallace Stevens, Opus Posthumous, ed. Milton J. Bates (rev., enlarged and corrected edn., New York: Knopf, 1989) 183.

> When people speak of the romantic, they do so in what the French commonly call a *pejorative* sense. But poetry is essentially romantic, only the romantic of poetry must be something constantly new and, therefore, just the opposite of what is spoken of as the romantic. Without this new romantic, one gets nowhere; with it, the most casual things take on transcendence, and the poet rushes brightly, and so on. What one is always doing is keeping the romantic pure: eliminating from it what people speak of as the romantic.[12]

Bornstein gives a good account of the term 'romantic', saying, 'Throughout his career Stevens uses *romantic* in two senses, both of which derive from his response to literary romanticism'. According to him, when Stevens admits the romantic nature of poetry by saying that 'poetry is essentially romantic' and emphasises the nature of its freshness and pureness, the Romantic is positively used to denote the imaginative perception on which poetry depends. On the other hand he rejects 'some phase of the romantic that has become stale' since 'without recreation within the pulsations of an artery, perception hardens into the dead weight of outmoded convention'. In this sense, 'romantic' is commonly mentioned in a pejorative sense.[13] Stevens claims that the word 'romantic', used in a positive sense, alludes to a fresh creativity of the poetic imagination in the face of verbal representations that have grown stale. With his poetic principle of the Romantic he sharply points out the failure of the imagination in Romantic poetry: 'it [the romantic] is a failure of the imagination precisely as sentimentality is a failure of feeling' and 'the achievement of the romantic . . . lies in minor wish-fulfilments and it is incapable of abstraction.'

By linking the imagination with 'feeling', Stevens not only ascribes the Romantic to the failure of the imagination but also implicitly indicates the sentimental state of feeling emotionally overwhelmed, which checks the free

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[12] Wallace Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens, ed. Holly Stevens (Berkeley: U of California P, 1966) 277.
[13] Bornstein 6-7.

activity of the imagination. We can find, as a Romantic characteristic, the emphasis on the free expression of feelings. To take an example in the 'Preface' to the second edition of Wordsworth and Coleridge's Lyrical Ballads (1800), Wordsworth asserts that 'poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'.[14] The immediate act of composition out of unforced and authentic feelings was regarded in some ways as more valid than the products of the formal rules and conventions inherited from the neo-classical period. Not only Wordsworth but also other Romantics express their feelings in the most direct and vivid way. Stevens denies the Romantic emphasis on the direct expression of strong emotion and instead adopts abstract expression to avoid sentimentalism. What Stevens meant by 'abstract' is explained by Gelpi. Quoting a passage about 'poetic truth' from 'The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet' in The Necessary Angel, Gelpi expounds the nature of the 'truth' of poetry which is created through the process of abstraction.

> . . . the "truth" of poetry is a function of the poet's personality: "the imagination of a man disposed to be strongly influenced by his imagination" abstracts and translates elements from reality into his chosen medium so that there he can arrange them so as to fashion a sense, however illusory, of "an agreement with reality, . . . which he believes, for a time, to be true, expressed in terms of his emotions or, since it is less of a restriction to say so, in terms of his own personality."[15]

Bornstein, consulting 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words' in The Necessary Angel, extends the meaning of 'abstract' as follows:

> "The Noble Rider" gives a gloss on what Stevens meant by abstract: the poet "must be able to abstract himself and also to abstract reality, which he does by placing it in his imagination".(NA 23) To do that the poet first had to cleanse himself of past incrustations, whether of personal

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[14] William Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads, ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, 2nd ed., (1963; London: Methuen; London: Routledge, 1991) 266. It is worth noting that Wordsworth mentions this sentence twice in the 'Preface'.

[15] Gelpi 77.

perception or of literary history. [16]

It is necessary for the poet to commit himself to the abstraction of reality from 'past incrustations', defunct meanings. In order to create the supreme fiction, he must behold reality without any false preconceptions. For Stevens it is important to create a new and vital Romanticism opposed to the complete absorption into Romantic tradition. His pursuit of artistic freedom from the constraints of literary tradition is realised by a technique similar to that used in abstract painting. Through this technique the poet can deconstruct reality in order to create ideal orders out of multiple possibilities.

In 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words' Stevens also shows his strict attitude towards the relation between the imagination and reality. He says, 'The pejorative sense applies where the poet is not attached to reality, where the imagination does not adhere to reality, which, for my part, I regard as fundamental'[17]. Though the context is different, the same may be said, no doubt, of the Romantic in a pejorative sense. Stevens labels the achievement of the Romantic imagination as 'minor wish-fulfilments', which suggests the acknowledged desire for the union of the imagination and reality to be fulfilled in dreams and fantasies. Or we may say that 'wish-fulfilment' means self-sufficient indulgence in fantasy where desire is satisfied, inviting the solipsistic problem of the imagination. Stevens has a similar view of poetic imagination to the Romantics in that he believes in the power of imagination to solve the problem of the dualism between art and existential reality. However unlike Stevens the Romantics believe in the transcendental power of imagination to perceive an ultimate reality, in which even the divine presence flickers. In his use of the term 'the romantic' Stevens is conscious of the negative as well as the affirmative sense of it. For Stevens, the negative aspect of the 'romantic' and its problems lie in the failure of the imagination and the naïve acceptance of the power of the imagination. Against Romanticism in this pejorative sense, Stevens had practised

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[16] Bornstein 219.

[17] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 31.

the definition of his new Romanticism and created a supreme fiction configured out of nothingness. The failure in the relation between the imagination and reality, according to Stevens, is due to 'the pressure of reality'.[18] The imagination which thrives on the unreal and conflicts with the pressure of reality by pressing back against it provides the true poetic space. And it is necessary for him to have a pure poetic space of imaginative creativity, which takes firm root in earth without heaven and hell or without religious resonance. This can be said to be what is 'modern' about Stevens.

As a modernist Stevens has a distinctively different vision from the Romantics, yet he inherits Romanticism and shares the matrix of poetic thought that underlies Romantic poetry. On the influence of Romanticism on Stevens, Carlos Baker comments as follows:

> None of the moderns was a stronger exponent of romanticism – at least as he defined it – than was Wallace Stevens, not even W. B. Yeats, who proudly claimed a place among the "last romantics". But Stevens, like the mature Yeats, remained indubitably himself rather than a pale simulacrum of any of his elders. The spoils he gathered from his quiet raids into romantic territory became peculiarly his own and stand as typical examples of that whole series of piecemeal transferences and modifications, original responses to aboriginal provocations, which repeatedly took place when the moderns confronted the work of their eminent forebears.[19]

Refashioning what he gains from his predecessors to suit his new Romanticism, Stevens has established the relationship of his own poetry to Romantic tradition. Though Stevens senses the same problem with the balance between the imagination and reality as the Romantics had, he insists that his 'reality-imagination complex' is entirely his own[20] and finds his poetic identity.

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[18] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 13.
[19] Carlos Baker, The Echoing Green: Romanticism, Modernism, and the Phenomena of Transference in Poetry (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1984) 11.
[20] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 792. The subject of 'reality-imagination complex' will

Before moving on to a closer examination of Stevens's thought of poetic imagination, we must consider the achievement and failure in Romanticism to clarify Stevens's response to it.

Among the Romantics, Samuel Taylor Coleridge is the poet who most rigorously and influentially defines imagination. Several chapters of Coleridge's Biographia Literaria (1817), especially Chapter 13, are exclusively devoted to his view of the imagination. 'The Imagination', he says, 'I consider either as primary or secondary'. Then follows the distinction between the two kinds of imagination.

> The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead.[21]

Though a lot of critics have attempted to interpret the distinction, the difference between the primary and secondary imagination can be said to lie only in degree and the mode of the operation. For example, James Engell explains the difference by saying, 'The secondary imagination is part of a self-conscious and willful apperception; the primary degree exercises involuntary or "automatic" perception'. According to him,

> Coleridge uses the word "recreate" to emphasize that the primary imagination has first formed in the mind the various images of nature. The secondary imagination "dissolves", alters, and reforms these images. It mediates between and *re-conciles* the separate experiences and

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be taken up in Chapter 3.

[21] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, Bollingen Series LXXV, vol.1 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983) 304.

knowledge perceived in bits by the primary degree.[22]

The point is that Coleridge acknowledges the function of the imagination to harmonise separate images and its divine faculty and capacity to animate objects which 'are essentially fixed and dead'. The recreation of the external world can be compared to the work of God the Creator in that it involves 'a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM'. The repetition of the act of Creation in the finite mind transforms the inanimate objects of the external world into an idealized unity.

In Chapter 14 of Biographia Literaria Coleridge again makes a claim that the 'synthetic and magical power' of the imagination reconciles opposites:

> This power . . . reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgement ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature . . .[23]

Such a claim that poetry can effect harmonisation between the natural and the artificial is taken up by Stevens after the Romantics. This is indicated by Bornstein, who examines how Coleridge's theory of the imagination is adapted by Stevens. According to Bornstein, Stevens alludes to Coleridge's view of the imagination as bringing about the reconciliation of opposites when he says in The Necessary Angel: 'The imagination is the power that enables us to perceive the normal in the abnormal, the opposite of chaos in chaos' (153).[24] And the dream of unity realised in the imagination leads to a new relationship with reality. Poetry which could become part of reality is what Stevens requires for Romantic

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[22] James Engell, The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1981) 345.
[23] Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, vol. 2, 16-17.
[24] Bornstein 183.

imagination. The problem is how far Coleridge could have realised his desire for the fusion of opposite or discordant qualities in poetry. His struggle to grasp and express what he dreams and the failure of the imagination show Coleridge's Romantic dilemma, which can be also witnessed in other Romantics.

Mellor attempts an interesting argument about Coleridge's subtle attempt to protect his theory of the imagination.

> Coleridge's enthusiastic affirmation of the primary and secondary imagination is itself introduced by a long and apologetic letter, supposedly from an unnamed "friend" but actually written by Coleridge himself . . . While this "letter" is an effective rhetorical device to excuse any shortcomings in his description of the secondary and primary imagination, it also reveals Coleridge's own uncertainties and guilt concerning the truth and intelligibility of his own ideas. And long before the *Biographia* was written, this pattern of guilty self-doubt dominated many of Coleridge's poems, where it was most often expressed as a conflict between the demands of pure imagination and the demands of judgement.[25]

Mellor proceeds to relate 'Kubla Khan' (1816)[26] to 'guilty self-doubt'. According to her, the subtitle, 'A Vision in a Dream: A Fragment' as well as the preface, together with the eighteen-year delay in publishing the poem testify to 'guilty self-doubt' towards his own creative production. Coleridge asserts the capacity of the imagination to recreate life through the reconciliation between the opposed forces, 'while the framing preface and subtitle simultaneously denounce that reconciliation as incomplete'.[27] The 'guilty self-doubt' can be said to be a latent

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[25] Mellor 152.

[26] Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poems, ed. John Beer, Everyman's Library (London and New York: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1974). References to Coleridge's poetry are to this edition and are hereafter given in the text.

[27] Mellor argues,

> His poem celebrates the divine capacity of the human imagination to recreate life, to reconcile the eternally opposed forces of life and death in a never-ending dynamic polarity, while the framing preface and subtitle simultaneously denounce that reconciliation as incomplete, frivolous, a drugged trifling with the laws of logic and morality which cannot and should not be taken seriously by the rational reader.

factor which limits the activity of poetic imagination. The conflict between the opposites is illustrated to show his difficulty in practising his theory of the imagination. The signal given by the subtitle and the preface helps us to see that the poem presents itself as concerned with the problematic nature of the act of poetic creation.

The Romantic dilemma about the continuity of the dream world and the actual world shows the tense relationship between imagination and reality as well as the artistic problem of representing what is imagined as real. The dilemma can be ascribed, to borrow Baker's argument, to Coleridge's recurrent awareness that his meditative joy is exposed to the always imminent forces of interruption and destruction of reality. In fact, this is notified beforehand in the preface. Therefore we read the poem with the preliminary knowledge that the poem will end abruptly. As a symbol of the imaginative product, a 'sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice' (36) presents itself as an antithetical state: the dome itself is both sunny and possessed of caves of ice. Then Baker remarks: 'The most important feature of the poem's internal structure is the series of contrasts there developed'. The tension in the poem between imagination and reality is created through 'the device of thesis-antithesis': light and darkness, civilisation and savagery, heat and cold, peace and war. And the co-presence of thesis-antithesis is enough to suggest the possibility that the Khan's situation is precarious.[28] This is also supported by Seamus Perry who says, 'The poised, precarious centre of "Kubla Khan", a contingent and rare "miracle" of perceptual synthesis, offers a fragile alternative to the failures of self-absorbed solipsism, on the one hand, and imaginative despotism, on the other'.[29] Coleridge's solipsistic immersion in the visionary world of 'Kubla Khan' shows the defeat of the imagination against reality. Granted that the reconciliation is gained momentarily, the costly victory of the 'imaginative despotism' still leads us to wonder whether the reconciliation is a successful and desired one. The poem, which is subtitled as a fragment, ends abruptly owing to

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(159)

[28] Baker 63-66.

[29] Seamus Perry, Coleridge and the Uses of Division (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999) 208.

his loss of imaginative power to 'revive' (42) within him the maiden's 'symphony and song' (43) or poetic imagination. And the failure to sustain the 'vision in a dream' shows a problematic break between vision and incarnation.

We cannot identify whether he was interrupted by the real or imaginary 'person on business from Porlock' described in the preface of the poem; however, it is obvious that what interrupted a vision in his dream was reality. In other words, the poem shows the defeat of the imagination by the pressure of reality. Against such a negative view of the poem as the failure of the poetic act, K. M. Wheeler argues that the poem records a partial triumph in the demonstration of the process of creation.[30] However, owing to the dream-vision framework, the partial triumph of the imagination contradictorily invites the solipsistic problem. The solipsistic imagination without the concrete reality of nature is vulnerable to reality. Or considering Mellor's argument, we might suggest that Coleridge, who is conscious of the problem of imagination, uses the subtitle and the preface for the purpose of self-deconstruction.

In 'The Eolian Harp' (1795), the 'guilty self-doubt' again appears when the poet fears that he must deny the meditative joy of communion with Nature for his faith in orthodox Christianity. Being attracted to a heretical faith is the beginning of the ultimate self-doubt. In his hesitating question beginning 'what if' (44), he wonders about another possible framework for his faith.

> And what if all of animated nature
> Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd,
> That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
> Plastic and vast, one intellectual Breeze,

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[30] K.M. Wheeler describes his positive view as follows,

> . . . all of the productions of imagination seem only portions and fragments in comparison with what the mind is able to remember vaguely that it once knew: something whole and entire, a vision of eternity. The text is only a portion of that eternity. It is in this metaphorical sense that 'Kubla Khan' should be understood as a fragment: as an organic whole it is complete in itself; though, as a plant may grow to a larger size, lines may be added to increase it, but their additions do not imply that in its present size it is imperfect or incomplete in any aesthetic sense.

K.M. Wheeler, The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1981) 27.

At once the Soul of each, and God of all? (44-48)

Through rapturous immersion in the natural music of the harp played by 'one intellectual Breeze', Coleridge feels an organic unity of the soul and all creation, in which each soul, though diversely framed, responds to each other and vibrates in sympathy, creating oneness with nature. However, the moment that the poet attains union with nature, he denies it as heretical pantheism.[31] Bloom says,

> Coleridge will go on to write several "poems of pure Imagination", but he will liberate himself into his potential all too rarely. *The Eolian Harp* shows why. The imagination wishes to be indulged, and Coleridge feared the moral consequences of such indulgence.[32]

Bloom's expression, 'The imagination wishes to be indulged' seems to be from Stevens's 'Adagia'.[33] The quotation from Stevens suggests that Bloom consciously seems to indicate a characteristic of imagination shared by Romantic and modern poets. But, unlike Stevens, Coleridge shows the tragical situation of Romantic imagination. Despite being blessed with an opportunity for interrelation with Nature, 'O! the one Life within us and abroad' (26), the poet, who vacillates between epiphanic communion with God in nature and his Christian faith, discards the moment and returns to orthodox Christianity. Yet in such a communion with nature, his theory of the imagination was realised in the most ideal shape. Ironically, the interruption of the communion is the reality of his Christian faith.

The Eolian Harp is often used in Romantic writing to symbolise a reciprocal communion with nature. Abrams writes:

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[31] Engell explains the relation between the theory of the imagination and pantheism as follows:

> For a time after finishing the *Biographia*, Coleridge felt that the imagination had betrayed him into a mistaken pantheistic attitude. The unity of the Dynamic, of being and matter, subjective and objective, easily led to the assumption that the creator or God was in his nature the mere addition of all being and phenomena. God would then not be one being but wholly immanent instead. (362)

Though 'The Eolian Harp' was composed before Biographia Literaria, the poem shows Coleridge's intuition of irreligious pantheism in the union with nature.

[32] Bloom, The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry 202.

[33] Stevens, Opus Posthumous 186.

> No less characteristic of romantic theory is a set of alternative analogies implying that poetry is an interaction, the joint effect of inner and outer, mind and object, passion and the perceptions of sense. Thus Shelley illustrates his initial definition of poetry as 'the expression of the imagination' by reference to that favorite romantic toy, the Aeolian lyre. . . . The Aeolian lyre is the poet, and the poem is the chord of music which results from the reciprocation of external and internal elements, of both the changing wind and the constitution and tension of the strings.[34]

In the poem Coleridge also demonstrates the wish for harmonious union, in the lines, 'Which meets all motion and becomes its soul, / A light in sound, a sound-like power in light' (27-28), thus showing that the border between subject and object disappears. But we should not overlook that this Romantic instrument attains the harmonious moment in a passive state.

> Full many a thought uncall'd and undetain'd,
> And many idle flitting phantasies,
> Traverse my indolent and passive brain,
> As wild and various as the random gales
> That swell and flutter on this subject Lute! (39-43)

Against the passive performance completely depending on the wind, Stevens gives an active performance on the 'Blue Guitar' as he orchestrates the music of a new Romanticism.

The feeling of being one with the life of nature can also be witnessed in 'Frost at Midnight' (1798). Through the poet's active meditation, the oppositions between the warmth of the indoors and the coldness of the outdoors and between the thoughts of past and future and the present moment are merged, creating an intense atmosphere of oneness. The poet's strong current of feeling culminates in his referring to the perception of the divine presence in a harmonising interdependence.

> . . . so shalt thou see and hear

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[34] Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp 51. The quotation is from A Defence of Poetry.

> The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
> Of that eternal language, which thy God
> Utters, who from eternity doth teach
> Himself in all, and all things in himself.
> Great universal Teacher! he shall mould
> Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask. (58-64)

Thus he is repeatedly tempted to suggest a reconciliation of man and nature through the imagination which creates a complete harmonisation. However, Coleridge could just realise his desire for the reconciliation momentarily in a safe and withdrawn place from the outside world. This isolated and calm setting secures a meditative joy from disturbing elements from the outside: 'The inmates of my cottage, all at rest, / Have left me to that solitude, which suits / Abstruser musings' (4-6) and 'Sea, hill, and wood, / This populous village! Sea, and hill, and wood, / With all the numberless goings-on of life, / Inaudible as dreams' (9-13). Baker discusses Coleridge's attempt to solve an essential disunity between his isolated world and the outside world. According to him,

> The antidote to all this was his recurrent dream of an earthly paradise. . . . Humbly enough in these verses [the reflective poems] he asks no more than a place of peace where in times of spiritual agoraphobia he can take refuge and find solace. . . . Such, too, was the interior of the same cottage one frosty midnight in the next winter when Coleridge sat dreaming of his own childhood and planning a happier and better one for his infant son, Hartley.[35]

The communion with nature in an isolated place solves the problem of his constant preoccupation with the loss of the imaginative world against reality, but the reader wonders whether Coleridge unconsciously indulges in solipsistic imaginings. The realisation of the momentary reconciliation in a place safe and isolated from the outside world casts a doubt about the validity of the realisation. It is because his poetic space, which is safe and peaceful, shows the tendency to escape from a

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[35] Baker 62.

reality which threatens interruption and destruction. The unstable state of Coleridge's imagination, haunted by precariousness, shows the defeat of the imagination by the pressure of reality as well as the failure to adhere to reality, of which Stevens writes. Rajan indicates that in the poem 'there is an acknowledgement of the isolation of the imagining consciousness and a similarly problematical attempt to achieve an experience of communion'. It is because, according to Rajan, 'his consciousness turns solipsistically back on itself, caught in the inevitable narcissism of its attempts to grasp the external world as an object in relation to a subject rather than as a purely objective reality'.[36] The narcissistic immersion in his own visionary world shows Coleridge's falling into solipsism.

The solipsistic state of Coleridge's imagination also brings into question the nature of artistic representation. Abrams refers to Romantic stress on the expression of emotion, and quotes an example from Chapter 15 of Biographia Literaria. Here, the image, by being 'modified by a predominant passion; or by associated thoughts or images awakened by that passion', comes to characterise the poet. Abrams argues:

> Of all his contemporaries, Coleridge was the most concerned with the problem of how the poetic mind acts to modify or transform the materials of sense without violating truth to nature. Toward its solution, . . . he formulated the keystone of his critical system, his theory of imagination. In this characteristic passage he considers the role of emotion in the process of such transformation. . .[37]

But what if the role of emotion produces a result opposite to what Coleridge has intended? Seeking harmonisation between imagination and reality, he is

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[36] Rajan 224-25.

[37] Abrams quotes the following lines from Biographia Literaria.

> Images, however beautiful, though faithfully copied from nature, and as accurately represented in words, do not of themselves characterize the poet. They become proofs of original genius only as far as they are modified by a predominant passion; or by associated thoughts or images awakened by that passion . . . or lastly, when a human and intellectual life is transferred to them from the poet's own spirit, 'Which shoots its being through earth, sea, and air.'

Abrams , The Mirror and the Lamp 55.

overwhelmed by his assumption of the fulfilment of his desire in 'Frost at Midnight'. This ironic state is reflected in the emotional tone permeating the poem, which is enhanced by his repeated use of exclamation marks. His overwhelmed feeling is ahead of the imagination, checks its free activity and fails to liberate it from the mind which is falling into sentimentality. This reminds us of Stevens's criticism of Romanticism: 'it [the romantic] is a failure of the imagination precisely as the sentimentality is a failure of feeling'. From Stevens's perspective, Coleridge, who fails to control his emotion, romanticising a communion with nature, turns the poetic space into a place where outmoded representation prevails. The result is the loss of that fresh and creative activity of the imagination which Stevens claims to be essential.

In 'Dejection: An Ode' (1817) Coleridge's belief in the organic function of the imagination as well as its failure is well expounded. In the poem he explains that nature 'lives' only in the mind because man bestows beauty and life upon it: 'O Lady! we receive but what we give, / And in our life alone does Nature live: / Ours is her wedding-garment, ours her shroud!'(47-49). The metaphor of the wedding of man's mind to the natural world is cancelled by the following word 'shroud'. This image, implying death, suggests that without creative interaction with the external world through the imagination reciprocity between man and nature cannot exist. Unlike Wordsworth who testifies in his poetry that the mind can be elevated by outward things, Coleridge retorts here that the external world is subject to the mind since 'the passion and the life' (46) within himself bestows beauty, life and meaning upon Nature. The joy we find in nature is really in ourselves. This joyous state of mind enables us to wed ourselves to nature, creating internal harmony of spirit, and the dowry of this wedding is 'a new Earth and a new Heaven': 'Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power, / Which wedding Nature to us gives in dow'r / A new Earth and new Heaven' (67-69). However, he laments the decay of his imaginative power in his unhappy state of mind which cannot press back against the pressure of reality: 'Hence, viper thoughts, that coil around my mind, / Reality's dark dream!' (94-95).

The heightened sense of the limit of imagination in his dejection reflects the uncontrollable performance of the 'Wind' on the Aeolian harp.

> I turn from you, and listen to the wind,
> Which long has rav'd unnoticed. What a scream
> Of agony by torture lengthen'd out
> That lute sent forth! Thou Wind, that rav'st without,
> Bare crag, or mountain-tairn, or blasted tree,
> Or pine-grove whither woodman never clomb,
> Or lonely house, long held the witches' home,
> Methinks were fitter instruments for thee,
> Mad Lutanist! who in this month of show'rs,
> Of dark-brown gardens, and of peeping flow'rs,
> Mak'st Devils' yule, with worse than wint'ry song,
> The blossoms, buds, and tim'rous leaves among.
> Thou Actor, perfect in all tragic sounds!
> Thou mighty Poet, e'en to frenzy bold! (96-109)

The note of dissonance is quite different from the harmony felt in 'the one Life within us and abroad' in 'The Eolian Harp'. The dissonant music produced by the 'Mad Lutanist' might reveal his true feelings about the limits set on the 'synthetic and magical power' of the imagination.

Perry indicates Coleridge's double-mindedness in his announcement of the merits of unity, while insisting on the significance of the truth of division. It is necessary for Coleridge to have the capability of entertaining various kinds of perception since he is capable of finding a virtue even in inconsistency. Perry finds 'the permanent claim of his [Coleridge's] mind lying not in any abiding unity it synthesises out of its recalcitrant elements, but in the scrupulous energy of its inconsequence'.[38] Praising Coleridge's double-mindedness, Perry also refers to his difficulty in achieving reconciliation.[39] This is a tribute to the poet's verbal art

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[38] Perry develops his discussion on the doubled theme of unity and division. The quoted line is from p. 2 in 'Introduction' to Coleridge and the Uses of Division.

[39] Perry indicates, 'But such final reconciliations are more easily conceived than achieved'

since not only 'Dejection: An Ode' but also 'Kubla Khan', 'The Eolian Harp' and 'Frost at Midnight' show an awareness of a common artistic problem. Rajan comments: 'Through distinctions between symbol and allegory, imagination and fancy, imitation and copy, Coleridge seems voluntarily to give us tools that can be used to dissect his own poetic production'.[40] This evokes Coleridge's 'guilty self-doubt' and poetic intelligence about reconciliation.

What complicates the understanding of his poetry seems to lie in his self-defensive attitude. Mellor concludes her arguments on Coleridge as follows:

> Guiltily, he feared that he would be blamed for the truths he saw, and guiltily he responded with a set of defensive, self-justifying rhetorical strategies that effectively deny his responsibility for these truths and even on occasion their very accuracy.[41]

It is true that we cannot ignore Coleridge's 'defensive, self-justifying rhetorical strategies'. If Coleridge admits the discontinuity between language and its object, he deliberately structures his poetry to be subject to self-deconstruction. The problem is that the self-deconstruction is cancelled by the poet's immersion in the visionary world that we witness in 'Kubla Khan'. Even if he comes close to realising his view of the imagination as the reconciler of man and nature, as in 'Frost at Midnight', the poet's retreat into a secluded place or his self-defensive attitude deconstructs his communion with nature. The self-defensive attitude shows the defeat of the imagination against the pressure of reality. The poet's act of creation which reflects the failure ends with the faithful descriptions of the sentimental state of his mind at the expense of intellectual abstraction.

We cannot deny that the 'guilty self-doubt' indicated by Mellor precludes Coleridge from making use in practice of the 'synthetic and magical power' of the imagination which reconciles opposites. Though more positively, it can be argued that Coleridge's poetic intelligence is evident in his self-doubt, his awareness of his self-divisions, especially the gap between his theory about the imagination and the

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[40] Rajan 237.

[41] Mellor 164.

embodiment of the theory in practice enhances the sense of doubt and may discourage the poet from having confidence in the imagination. Keats describes the older poet's inner struggle appropriately when he writes:

> I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason – Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge.[42]

To seek to impose a definition for logical understanding is, in Mellor's words, to reject 'the fundamental Keatsian poetic quality of emphatic openness to *all* experience, of "negative capability"'.[43] Stevens, who acknowledges the authenticity of the imagination as well as the problem of reconciliation between imagination and reality, achieves in his terms what Coleridge desires.

William Wordsworth agrees with Coleridge that the creative activity of the imagination resembles that of God. For Wordsworth the act of creation performed by the imagination is divine, as I shall go on to show, so that he can believe that some essential relation between truth and reality is fully realised in the imagination. With the belief in a synthesising imagination which creates a harmonious relationship between the mind and the external world, Wordsworth in the passage printed in 1814 as a 'Prospectus' to the never-completed work, The Recluse, to which The Prelude was intended to serve as an introductory poem, offers a prayer to the Muse for the wedding of man's mind to the natural world.

> . . . Paradise, and groves
> Elysian, Fortunate Fields – like those of old
> Sought in the Atlantic Main – why should they be
> A history only of departed things,
> Or a mere fiction of what never was?
> For the discerning intellect of Man,

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[42] John Keats, The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1958) 193-94.
[43] Mellor 77.

When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day.
- I, long before the blissful hour arrives,
Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse
Of this great consummation . . .
. . . while my voice proclaims
How exquisitely the individual Mind
. . . to the external World
Is fitted . . .
The external World is fitted to the Mind;
And the creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish: - this is our high argument. (47-71)[44]

Wordsworth proclaims his 'high argument' whose content represents his desire as well as his prayer for the marriage of imagination and nature. His proclamation has an antecedent model in The Prelude where he describes his new theme for epic poetry as 'what passed within me . . . / This is in truth heroic argument' (Book III, 174-182).[45] Wordsworth frames these declarations in terms that derive from Paradise Lost, in the opening of which Milton declares the importance of his theme as the 'great argument' (Book I, 24). In contrast with Milton's Christian epic, Wordsworth in The Prelude demonstrates a new style of epic. By developing the

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[44] The poem is quoted from The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. E. De Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, vol. 5 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949) 4-5.

[45] I quote the 1805 poem, agreeing with other critics. Stephen Gill says that it is poetically the finest version since Wordsworth in 1805 declares the poem finished. Wordsworth continued to revise it throughout his life to suit the later thoughts of a much older and much changed poet who had adapted a cautious conservatism. Graham Hough also prefers the 1805 version for similar reasons. Stephen Gill, William Wordsworth: The Prelude, Landmarks of the World Literature Ser. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) 6. Graham Hough, The Romantic Poets, 2nd ed. (London: Hutchinson, 1957) 28. The poem is quoted from The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill, Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 1979). Quotations from The Prelude are from this edition and are hereafter given in the text.

personal history of the growth of his own mind as the poet through the benevolent influence of Nature in forming his imagination, he shows how the power of the imagination led to Love of Mankind.

Wordsworth puts a high value on Nature as a religious and moral agent since it is through the intense communion with Nature that the imagination's powers are drawn out and developed. Therefore, against the traditional subject matter of Milton's Christian epic, Wordsworth locates Paradise, not in the Garden of Eden as in biblical history, but in the communion of the mind with nature in the actual world. Through this communion transcendental moments of revelation are granted. Bloom suggests both Wordsworth and Stevens salute the 'immediate possibility of this earthly paradise'. Quoting the last lines from 'Esthétique du Mal', Bloom says, 'Wordsworth celebrates the *given* – what we already possess, and for him it is as for Wallace Stevens "As if the air, the mid-day air, was swarming / With the metaphysical changes that occur, / Merely in living as and where we live". For Wordsworth, as for Stevens, the earth is enough.'[46] Both of them admit that the role of the imagination in the given world verges on religious and metaphysical activity. The celebration of the holy union on the common earth in poetry can be a mode of salvation for them. But Stevens differs from Wordsworth in his conception of poetry during the age of the loss of belief in God.[47] In Stevens's poetry, in place of religious belief, we find no divine presence, which suggests a characteristic of new Romanticism.

In The Prelude Wordsworth again insists on 'an ennobling interchange / Of action from within and from without' (Book XII, 376-377). In The Recluse such

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[46] Bloom, The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry 126-27.

[47] In Letters of Wallace Stevens Stevens says that poetry should be the alternative to religious belief at a time when 'the strength of the church grows less and less until the church stands for little more than property' and continues, 'My trouble and the trouble of a great many people, is the loss of belief in the sort of God in Whom we were all brought up to believe'. (348) He also says,

> If one no longer believes in God (as truth), it is not possible merely to disbelieve; it becomes necessary to believe in something else. Logically, I ought to believe in essential imagination, but that has its difficulties. It is easier to believe in a thing created by the imagination. A good deal of my poetry recently has concerned an identity for that thing. (Ibid. 370)

communion is metaphorically stated through the image of the wedding and celebrated in a prothalamion, 'the spousal verse / Of this great consummation'. The poet's spirit of religious love permeates the pious atmosphere in the poem. This is supported by religious words such as 'Faith' (15), 'love and holy passion' (54) and 'the blissful hour' (56) and also the use of a prayer-like intercession in the concluding lines:

> . . . If such theme
> May sort with highest objects, then – dread Power!
> Whose gracious favour is the primal source
> Of all illumination, – may my Life
> Express the image of a better time,
> More wise desires, and simpler manners; · nurse
> My Heart in genuine freedom: · all pure thoughts
> Be with me; · so shall thy unfailing love
> Guide, and support, and cheer me to the end! [emphases added]

He desires a 'dread Power' or imagination through which he would achieve complete absorption of himself in the life of an active universe in which a pervading spirit supplies the continuing presence of God.

Wordsworth's emphasis on the immanence of God or His presence in Nature is repeatedly mentioned in his poetical works. For instance, in The Prelude the description of the divine presence can be witnessed in 'The life of Nature, by the God of love / Inspired – celestial presence ever pure' (Book XI, 99-100) and 'the great system of the world, / Where man is sphered, and which God animates' (Book XIII, 267-68). All of this amounts to saying that though God vanishes from the world which He has created, He is ever-present in the world, inspiring and animating the life of nature. His creation is sustained moment by moment. Wordsworth believes in the immanence of God in Nature and the divine power of human imagination which is related to the communion with Nature and works as the sacred power. However, he does not have a simple view of the relationship between Nature or reality and imagination. Though Wordsworth tries to see a

marriage between the two as the most desirable, there are many occasions when one overwhelms the other. Jonathan Wordsworth indicates some cases of the usurpation between mind and nature in The Prelude, showing a sympathetic reading of it. But it is interesting to find that he deconstructs the poet's affirmative postulates of the marriage between reality and imagination in his account of 'usurpation'.[48] Referring to his discussions, I would like to develop my own arguments.

At the crossing of the Alps in Book VI of The Prelude Wordsworth describes the power of imagination which usurped his consciousness, creating the 'invisible world'. The experience is described in the following terms.

> Imagination! – lifting up itself
> Before the eye and progress of my song
> Like an unfathered vapour, here that power,
> In all the might of its endowments came
> Athwart me. I was lost as in a cloud,
> Halted without a struggle to break through,
> And now, recovering, to my soul I say
> 'I recognise thy glory'. In such strength
> Of usurpation, in such visitings
> Of awful promise, when the light of sense
> Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
> The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,
> There harbours whether we be young or old. (Book VI, 525-37)

The epiphanic moment of his encounter with the 'invisible world' and his perception of God's engagement in nature through imagination are again granted on Mount Snowdon in the last book of The Prelude.

> A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
> All over this still ocean, and beyond,

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[48] Jonathan Wordsworth, William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982).

Far, far beyond, the vapours shot themselves
In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes,
Into the sea, the real sea, that seemed
To dwindle and give up its majesty,
Usurped upon as far as sight could reach. (Book XIII, 45-51)

At the climactic scene the landscape of Snowdon is transformed by the imagination into an amazing spectacle of a fantasy ocean of mist, usurping the 'real sea' of the Irish Channel.

The encounter with such sublime scenery creates for the poet the metaphysical relation of the individual mind and the external Mind in Nature. The two minds are closely integrated and should be united in a single harmony in the communion by the imagination. Wordsworth narrates the experience of the power of Nature appealing to the 'higher minds' (90) blessed with imagination and their creative response to Nature. The communion in the human imagination between natural and supernatural is well demonstrated at the same climbing of Snowdon described after the lines quoted above.

This is the very spirit in which they [the higher minds] deal
With all the objects of the universe:
They from their native selves can send abroad
Like transformation, for themselves create
A like existence, and, when'er it is
Created for them, catch it by an instinct.
Them the enduring and the transient both
Serve to exalt. They build up greatest things
From least suggestions, ever on the watch,
Willing to work and to be wrought upon.
They need not extraordinary calls
To rouze them – in a world of life they live,
By sensible impressions not enthralled,
But quickened, rouzed, and made thereby more fit

To hold communion with the invisible world. (Book XIII, 91-105)

In these lines Wordsworth represents the human imagination as creative as well as receptive, as bringing about a transformation in perception of external Nature. Wordsworth stresses the coexistence of creativity and receptivity or perception in the mind whose activity resembles the mind of the infant babe as the closest being to God.[49] In the godlike role of the infant babe as a 'creator and receiver' (Book II, 273) we can find the divine power of human imagination. He owes the possession of the 'higher minds' to 'the Deity' in 'the invisible world': 'Such minds are truly from the Deity' (Book XIII, 106).

The poet meditates on the creative mind's communion with the invisible world and the fulfilment of his desire for the marriage of imagination and nature. The question then arises whether the poet cherishes the fallacy that he has attained the reconciliation. The poet's use of the metaphor of usurpation by the imagination, which aggressively takes over reality, implicitly suggests the unbalanced state between the two. Wordsworth asserts that he owes it to the strength of imaginative usurpation in which the external is lit up even as it vanishes from sight that an awful promise of the invisible world, one haunted by the divine presence, is given to him. However, his assertion is undermined by the fact that imagination in this passage from *The Prelude* ends up claiming a value independent of reality. The passage's transcendental vision is brought at the risk (from Stevens's point of view) of solipsism. The divorce of imagination from reality runs against Stevens's assertion that the imagination must be dependent upon reality for its realisation.

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[49] Wordsworth sees the mind of the infant babe as 'even as an agent of the one great mind' owing to its reciprocal perception of the universe.

> An inmate of this *active* universe.
> From Nature largely he receives, nor so
> Is satisfied, but largely gives again;
> For feeling has to him imparted strength,
> And – powerful in all sentiments of grief,
> Of exultation, fear and joy – his mind,
> Even as an agent of the one great mind,
> Creates, creator and receiver both,
> Working but in alliance with the works
> Which it beholds. (The Prelude, Book II, 266-275)

Contrary to the case of the usurpation by imagination over reality, Nature becomes the usurper in the description of Mont Blanc's Nature in the Book VI of The Prelude.

> That day we first
> Beheld the summit of Mount Blanc, and grieved
> To have a soulless image on the eye
> Which had usurped upon a living thought
> That never more could be. (Book VI, 452-56)

At the sight of Mont Blanc Wordsworth could not reconcile himself with its reality and was strangely muted, while Shelley in his 'Mont Blanc' challenged his poetic imagination and the limitation of language in order to dissolve the boundary between the physical and the metaphysical worlds. Wordsworth was completely overwhelmed by the soulless image of Mont Blanc. Or we can say Wordsworth could not press back against the pressure of overwhelming reality exerted by Mont Blanc. The usurpation by reality shows the dominance of reality over the imagination, the weakness of which is revealed against the pressure of reality. The unbalanced state of the imagination and reality in both cases comes under the heading of what Stevens defines 'the romantic' as the pejorative sense.

Wordsworth's disappointment is relieved by the Vale of Chamouny whose landscape is described as follows:

> . . . The wondrous Vale
> Of Chamouny did, on the following dawn,
> With its dumb cataracts and streams of ice –
> A motionless array of mighty waves,
> Five rivers broad and vast – make rich amends,
> And reconciled us to realities.
> There small birds warble from the leafy trees,
> The eagle soareth in the element,
> There doth the reaper bind the yellow sheaf,
> The maiden spread the haycock in the sun,

> While Winter like a tamèd lion walks,
> Descending from the mountain to make sport
> Among the cottages by beds of flowers.
> (The Prelude, Book VI, 456-68)

According to Jonathan Wordsworth, at the sight of Mont Blanc Wordsworth's 'imagination itself has been taken over – displaced by reality, which, however beautiful, is dead'.[50] The Nature of Mont Blanc 'represents stasis, the death of imagination, as opposed to stillness, which for Wordsworth contains the possibility of development, change, rebirth'.[51] It can be said that the glacier of Chamouny, owing to its stillness, has the image of the potential to enact the transforming power of the human imagination.[52] Therefore Jonathan Wordsworth doubts the poet's statement: 'The wondrous Vale / Of Chamouny did . . . make rich amends / And reconciled us to realities' and argues, 'It is not reality that Wordsworth is reconciled to by the glacier, but a symbolic enactment of the potential in which he needed to believe.'[53] Wordsworth could not accept the Nature of Mont Blanc because it gave him the soulless image of 'fixity, stasis, death, objects as objects'[54] and did not stir the 'living thought'. In short it was necessary for Wordsworth to be in harmony with the 'active universe' (The Prelude, Book II, 266) in order to achieve the creative as well as receptive mind that can perceive the 'invisible world'.

The argument by Jonathan Wordsworth does not cover the whole passage of the poet's description of the landscape of the Vale of Chamouny but the first half of

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[50] Jonathan Wordsworth 176.

[51] Jonathan Wordsworth 191.

[52] Jonathan Wordsworth says:

> The glacier of Chamouny was especially well designed to stir the living thought, release the poet from realities. It is truly, 'a ferment' that is 'quiet and sublime'. Its 'dumb cataracts' may sound again, once more haunt the listener like a passion; its 'streams of ice' may flow again, frozen though they be; and the 'five rivers broad and vast' may be motionless, stopped for ever in their course, but the poet's imagination perceives them still as waves, for ever ready to move on. Like the 'dusky backs upheaved' of the mist on Snowdon, and 'the stationary blasts of waterfalls' in the Simplon Pass, these images of latent power enact and correspond to a need within the poet himself. (191)

[53] Jonathan Wordsworth 190-91.

[54] Jonathan Wordsworth 191.

the passage. However, we cannot overlook the latter half beginning with the lines, 'There small birds warble from the leafy trees, . . .' After giving us the topography of the Vale of Chamouny, Wordsworth describes picturesque scenery which can be said to be the same as the domesticated and agricultural nature of the Lake District where he was brought up. Even the seasonal climate is represented as mild: 'Winter like a tamèd lion walks, / Descending from the mountain to make sport / Among the cottages by beds of flowers'. We can always find in Wordsworth's gentle and peaceful Nature a picturesque harmony of natural and pastoral landscapes.[55] This Worthworthian Nature can be witnessed in the nature of the Vale of Chamouny. He can be reconciled with nature which is full of life with warbling small birds, the leafy trees, the soaring eagle, the reaper binding the yellow sheaf and the maiden spreading the haycock in the sun. According to Wordsworth's unfinished essay on 'The Sublime and the Beautiful',

> . . . it [the mind] is more dependent for its daily well-being upon the love & gentleness which accompany the one [beauty], than upon the exaltation or awe which are created by the other [sublimity]. – Hence, as we advance in life, we can escape upon the invitation of our more placid & gentle nature from those obtrusive qualities in an object sublime in its general character; . . . [56]

Wordsworth's aesthetic distinction between the sublime and the beautiful agrees with Edmund Burke's definition of the two terms in A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful: the sublime produces a sense of awe and the beautiful a sense of loveliness.[57] In contrast with Burke's

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[55] It is interesting to find his changed view of Nature in 'Elegiac Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, in a Storm, Painted by Sir George Beaumont' (composed in 1806). In this poem Wordsworth denies the visionary gleam got in the tranquil and peaceful nature as the fond illusion of his heart and decides to confront a hostile universe. Wordsworth could see the Castle standing sublime in the storm and embraces the stoical image of the painting as the very one which he should have for his life.

[56] William Wordsworth, The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974) 349.

[57] The conceptions of the beautiful and the sublime are discussed in the light of the relationship between feelings and forms of art. Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, ed. Adam Philips, World's

objective observation, Wordsworth shows his preference for beauty which affects his ability to appreciate the landscape of Mont Blanc and the Vale of Chamouny. This can be said to be one of the reasons why he could come to terms with the 'wondrous Vale of Chamouny' but not with the soulless image of Mont Blanc which 'usurped upon a living thought'.

When we think of Wordsworth's view of Nature, we have an impression that Wordsworth unconsciously has created a taste for Nature that is influenced by the surroundings where he was born and bred. His taste is based on the active and picturesque nature which appeals to him to invite the imagination. Nature must be active enough for him to recognise the presence of God who inspires and animates its life. The following extract will serve as evidence of this.

> . . . Gently did my soul
> Put off her veil, and, self-transmuted, stood
> Naked as in the presence of her God.
> As on I walked, a comfort seemed to touch
> A heart that had not been disconsolate,
> Strength came where weakness was not known to be,
> At least not felt; and restoration came
> Like an intruder knocking at the door
> Of unacknowledged weariness. (The Prelude, Book IV, 140-48)

And he also needs the paradisaical nature where he can have healing interchanges.

> But lovelier far than this the paradise
> Where I was reared, in Nature's primitive gifts
> Favored no less, and more to every sense
> Delicious, seeing that the sun and sky,
> The elements, and seasons in their change,
> Do find their dearest fellow-labourer there
> The heart of man . . . (The Prelude, Book VIII, 144-150)

Classics Ser. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990).

In such a bounteous nature with picturesque scenery Wordsworth can find his own paradise. Marjorie Levinson discusses this Worthworthian Nature which has the power to heal the mind, saying that 'Today's critic breaks no new ground in characterizing Wordsworth's Nature as "a refuge from man; a place of healing . . . ; a retreat".[58] Wordsworth has recourse to Nature which blesses him through the charm that appealed to his eyes and gives him the strength to restore him from weariness.

Therefore his spirit always returns to the paradise where he was reared because it exerts a beneficent influence on the adult Wordsworth, working as an inexplicable redemptive power to restore him when he is depressed. Wordsworth detects this power in his 'spots of time' (The Prelude, Book XI, 256). In the poem, such 'spots of time' represent highly impressive experiences in the past that revive within the mind, inviting speculative thoughts. Wordsworth describes the necessity to record the significance of his memories or 'spots of time' by recreating them in substance and in life.

> . . . The days gone by
> Come back upon me from the dawn almost
> Of life; the hiding-places of my power
> Seem open, I approach, and then they close;
> I see by glimpses now, when age comes on
> May scarcely see at all; and I would give
> While yet we may, as far as words can give,
> A substance and a life to what I feel:
> I would enshrine the spirit of the past
> For future restoration. (The Prelude, Book XI, 333-342)

Wordsworth, through the embodiment of his memories in words, seeks to enshrine the spirit of the past, so that it will restore him in the future.

In 'Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey' (1798) the 'spots of time' are

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[58] Marjorie Levinson, Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 32.

enshrined for future restoration but only at the cost of substituting a beautiful fiction for reality. Here the nature of the Wye valley is overwhelmed by the poet's powerful imagination.

> Though absent long,
> These forms of beauty have not been to me,
> As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
> But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din
> Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
> In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
> Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,
> And passing even into my purer mind
> With tranquil restoration . . . (22-30)[59]

Mary Moorman as well as Levinson indicates the hidden reality in the landscape by quoting William Gilpin's descriptions of its condition. Moorman reveals what Wordsworth does not mention in the poem: 'Gilpin describes its condition; the grass in the ruins was kept mown, but it was a dwelling-place of beggars and the wretchedly poor. The river was then full of shipping, carrying coal and timber from the Forest of Dean.'[60] Levinson also mentions the discrepant description of the landscape by quoting Gilpin's words:

> The country around Tintern Abbey hath been described as a solitary, tranquil scene: but its immediate environs only are meant. Within half a mile of it are carried on great iron-works; which introduce noise and bustle into these regions of tranquillity . . . Hitherto the river had been clear, and splendid . . . But its water now became ouzy, and discoloured. Sludgy shores too appeared, on each side, and other symptoms, which discovered the influence of a tide. (William Gilpin, *Observations on the*

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[59] The poems, except for the 'Prospectus' to The Recluse and The Prelude, are quoted from William Wordsworth, The Oxford Authors Ser., ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984).
[60] Mary Moorman, William Wordsworth: A Biography The Early Years 1770-1803 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1957) 402-03.

River Wye, 1792).[61]

According to the factual information given by Gilpin, at his first visit to the Wye valley in 1793 Wordsworth must have already noticed the contamination there. And at his second visit to the same valley, he could not have overlooked the more or less polluted Wye valley. But he gives us in the poem a different impression of the landscape, representing it as 'these forms of beauty'. His 'sensations sweet' are indebted to the 'forms of beauty', which he recalls in the mind and motivate his poetic imagination to create 'the picture of the mind' (62). The 'forms of beauty' given by the imagination had worked as a positive and inspiring power to anchor his 'purest thoughts' (110) for five years after his first visit. Therefore at the second visit he could again beautify all nature by recollecting what he sublimated five years ago[62] and create a fiction of the landscape in which his idealised nature was represented. Bloom, quoting a line from Stevens's 'Description without Place', argues, 'This is Wallace Stevens, in *Description without Place*, a poem that tries to suggest that to seem is to be, so that seeming, as well as everything we say of the past, is description without place, "a cast of the imagination".[63] Thus the framework of the poem is not the description of the real landscape but the fictional world. Wordsworth searches for what he can rely on in this fiction and dramatises it.

Wordsworth as 'a worshipper of Nature' (153) hymns his communion with the sacred universe in which he believes he can perceive the presence of God.

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[61] Levinson 31.

[62] Freudian or psychoanalytic approaches to the Romantic sublime are attempted by some critics. Thomas Weiskel, in his discussion of the egotistical sublime in 'Tintern Abbey', argues that the 'picture of the mind' is achieved through sublimation, and identifies the mechanism at work.

> It [The picture] is a picture without contents – actually, the possibility of picturing and the necessity of it: the formal, empty envelope of signification. Of course, it is filled by a version of the past that comes into being as a differential function of the present in the process Freud called *Nachträglichkeit* ("deferred action").

The transcending process of converting the undesirable into more acceptable and harmonious arrangement is relevant to Wordsworth's act of sublimation in 'the picture of the mind'. Thomas Weiskel, The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1976) 142.

[63] Bloom, The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry 128.

> . . . And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man: (94-100)

The perception of the presence of God through the communion binds more closely together the bonds which unite the poet and Nature. Therefore he is well pleased to recognise 'In nature and the language of the sense, / The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, / The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / Of all my moral being'(109-112). The deification of 'Tintern Abbey''s Nature can be shown by his use of a capital letter and the reference to 'her' in lines 123-24: 'Knowing that Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her'. Levinson indicates that Nature is a goddess by saying, "'Tintern Abbey''s Nature is a guardian of ground hallowed by private commemorative acts – Mnemosyne, a deeply conservative muse'. And she also says, 'Wordsworth approaches this presence in a spirit of worship'.[64] This can be emphasised by his use of religious words such as 'sublime', 'spirit', 'soul', 'prayer', 'faith', 'blessings', 'worshipper', 'service' and 'holier'. According to Levinson,

> "Tintern Abbey" evinces the poet's desire to house his experience, past and future, in a mental fortress . . . Or, the project of "Tintern Abbey" is to render Tintern Abbey a 'memory *locus*', a portable resort and restorative: "thy mind / Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms, / Thy memory be as a dwelling-place / For all sweet sounds and harmonies (140-43)". The inmate of such a structure – priest, poet, hermit – is not, of course, the political enthusiast but the poet of 'the philosophic mind', the mind that 'keeps its own inviolate retirement'.[65]

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[64] Levinson 23.
[65] Levinson 23-24.

The absence of Tintern Abbey in the poem is compensated for by having a fane in his mind, which works as his spiritual anchor. The problem is that the poet cannot accomplish the end desired in a solipsistic immersion in the visionary scenery, which is divorced from reality. Bloom, as we noted, identifies the poem with Stevens's 'Description without Place' since the observed scene is transformed into the fiction or, in Stevens's words, 'everything we say / Of the past is description without place, a cast / Of the imagination'. However, Wordsworth's picture of the mind which usurps the real place is quite different from Stevens's representation of reality. It is because Stevens does not exclude unfavourable sights from his field of vision.

The restorative memories of landscape enshrined in the mind work redemptively to promise 'life and food / For future years' (65-66). However, Rajan indicates the linguistic problem which haunts the 'gap between epiphany and the text of reminiscence':

> As a poem concerned with memory, and therefore with the signification of something absent by its mental image, it is centrally involved with questions of presence and absence as they relate to the attempt to represent what may not be there. . . . Repeatedly in the course of the poem the speaker draws attention to his inability to "paint / What then I was" (ll. 75-76), to convert image into thing and thus to write a logocentric poetry. But more and more he sees himself as having transcended the limits of mere pictorial reduplication (l.61), as having been "laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul" (ll.45-46).[66]

The attempt to assert meaning by insisting on the limits of language points up the difficulty of linking language and perceived reality. What guarantees the fiction divorced from reality is the presence of a living person who exists outside the fictive realm. Dorothy, according to Rajan, plays an important role to close the gap.

> Of crucial importance to this illusion of self-communion is the introduction of Dorothy into the poem. Dorothy is, in Shelley's words, the other who

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[66] Rajan 218-19.

> responds to the speaker with "the voice of his own soul" (*Alastor*, l.153), and makes otherness (the otherness of time as well as self) into identity. It is through her "voice" (l. 116) that he recovers an inner language which reawakens the "inland murmur" (l. 4) of the scene itself.[67]

Through Dorothy as objective presence, the truth of the fictive is confirmed. But we wonder whether her presence is effective within the fiction of the transformed reality, since she also must have known what the true landscape was before her eyes; and this wonder becomes a factor to deconstruct the poem. One can say that the discrepancy between the real landscape and 'the picture of the mind' (62) has been removed by the fact that through imagination Wordsworth has replaced the undesirable aspects of part of the landscape of the Wye valley with a 'green pastoral landscape' (159), marked by picturesque beauty. This landscape is for him a sacred world isolated from the secular world. However, the question is whether Wordsworth could have a true communion between his mind and Nature in transcendent reality gained by acts of exclusion of undesirable conditions in the landscape.

When we compare 'Tintern Abbey' with the sonnet, 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge' (1802), we must admit that Wordsworth shows a different attitude towards reality in each poem. The firm adherence to reality realised in the sonnet cannot be seen in 'Tintern Abbey'. This is well illustrated by Bornstein as well as Lucy Beckett. Both of them quote Stevens's reference to Wordsworth's 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge' in 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words' as indicating a perfect balance between the imagination and reality and how the poet may 'help people to live their lives'. 'To escapism in the pejorative sense, Stevens contrasts the firm adherence to reality of Wordsworth's imagination' in the sonnet. Against the fiction divorced from reality, what Stevens desires for supreme fiction is 'a world of poetry indistinguishable from the world in which we live'.[68]

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[67] Rajan 219.

[68] What is indicated by both these critics is the very same. Beckett argues,

> The example he [Stevens] uses in 'The Noble Rider' is Wordsworth's 'Upon Westminster Bridge', saying of it, 'This illustration must serve for all the rest. There is, in fact, a world of poetry indistinguishable from the world in which we live'.

Without any knowledge of Gilpin's description of the landscape, we would come to live in the world of 'Tintern Abbey'. But after knowing the historical facts, our response may differ. Though Wordsworth's expected vision must have been altered, we cannot find any descriptions of the distorted vision but his frequent reproductions of the beauteous forms which depose the real view before him. This is another example of the usurpation by the imagination. When we think of Wordsworth's ambiguous attitude towards nature or reality, which makes a contrast with the firm adherence to reality in the sonnet, we recognise that Wordsworth's view of imagination cannot be seen from one perspective only.[69]

Wordsworth handles in his major poetical works a consistent subject: the mind which has once separated from nature desires reunion with nature. For example in 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' (1804) Wordsworth deplores a sense of loss

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The choice of Wordsworth to demonstrate how, by achieving a perfect balance between reality and his own imagination, the poet may 'help people to live their lives', was more appropriate than perhaps Stevens realised.

Lucy Beckett, Wallace Stevens (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1974) 136.

Bornstein also says,

> In "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" Stevens adduces these lines from Wordsworth's sonnet to show "how poets help people to live their lives":
>
> This City now doth, like a garment, wear
> The beauty of the morning, silent bare,
> Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
> Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
> All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
>
> Poets help us to live our lives by restoring our sense of the world. To escapism in the pejorative sense, Stevens contrasts the firm adherence to reality of Wordsworth's imagination; for him, Wordsworth's lines replace a blank, insubstantial, and static world with a full, solid, and dynamic one, an intimation of "the world in which we shall come to live" through the poet's fictions. He must have delighted in Wordsworth's unwitting use of Stevens' own image for such fictions, the metaphor of the garment. (180)

[69] Thomas McFarland objects to Levinson, declaring that her reasoning that 'Wordsworth's pastoral prospect is a fragile affair, artfully assembled by acts of exclusion' is unfounded (3). Against Levinson's assertions, 'by narrowing and skewing his field of vision, Wordsworth manages to "see into the life of things."' and 'At the same time and quite casually, so it seems, he [Wordsworth] excludes from his field certain conflictual sights and meanings – roughly, the life of things', McFarland, by enumerating Wordsworth's concerns for the less fortunate condition of the society which can be witnessed in his other poems, indicates his social awareness and defends the poem from Levinson's charge by saying, 'But clearly it [the social awareness] does rise to consciousness; it simply is not fitting to the poem Wordsworth chose to write' (16). Whatever favourable reasons we can find for the poem, we cannot overlook the fact that the absence of the undesirable aspect of the landscape exists. Thomas McFarland, William Wordsworth: Intensity and Achievement (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

strongly felt in adulthood.

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore; -
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night to day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more. (1-9)

Wordsworth can no longer see the 'celestial light' (4) or 'visionary gleam' (56) which is reduced to prosaic daylight: 'At length the Man perceives it [the vision] die away, / And fade into the light of common day' (75-76). He cannot restore what he has lost as we have already observed in 'Tintern Abbey'. In this sense 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' can also be said to be a logocentric poetry. However, unlike the dramatization of the poet's recovery of his spiritual anchor in 'Tintern Abbey', in 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' Wordsworth offers a solution for the restoration which, in Cleanth Brooks's words, 'is asserted rather than dramatized'.[70] And the solution which is asserted in the ending is surprisingly modest.

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

As Brooks indicates:

> . . . some of the difficulties with which we meet in the last stanzas appear to be not enriching ambiguities but distracting confusions: e.g., the years bring the philosophical mind, but the child over which the years are to

[70] Cleanth Brooks, The Well Wrought Urn (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975) 148.

> pass is already the best philosopher. There is "something" that remains alive in our embers, but it is difficult for the reader to define it in relation to what has been lost.[71]

We can also give a different interpretation to the ending. In The Prelude Wordsworth demonstrates the love of Nature leading to the love of Mankind: 'My present theme / Is to retrace the way that led me on / Through Nature to the love of human-kind' (Book VIII, 586-88). This philanthropic attitude being brought about through the communion with nature can be also found in the ending of 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality'. Thus Wordsworth's lament for the loss of the 'visionary gleam' is compensated for by the growth of the mind to love others. Though we may articulate such positive interpretations, as Brooks suggests, 'some of the difficulties with which we meet in the last stanzas appear to be not enriching ambiguities but distracting confusions'. We wonder whether Wordsworth really feels that he manages to turn loss into gain.

As we have observed, Wordsworth's nostalgic desire for what is not present is strongly reflected in some poems. However, the problem of the inevitable corruption of the childhood vision is left open. Though Wordsworth believes in the promise of the invisible world in the workings of the imagination, we cannot overlook the unstable relationship between his imagination and nature. The tension in Wordsworth's poetry lies in the usurpation by the imagination or Nature. The contradictory elements in Wordsworth's attitude towards nature or reality deconstruct his desire for the harmonisation between imagination and reality since the balance between them is lost when one would overwhelm the other. Indeed, on occasions Wordsworth momentarily succeeds in reconciling imagination and reality. It is also true that at crucial moments such as we can find in the scenes of Mont Blanc and Tintern Abbey, the poetic imagination loses its balanced power and the problem of usurpation occurs.

The Romantic desire for reconciliation between imagination and reality, and the failure of that desire, have been treated by many critics. Geoffrey H. Hartman

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[71] Brooks, The Well Wrought Urn 149.

shows how self-consciousness works to fill the gap between the two terms in 'Romanticism and Anti-Self-Consciousness'. According to him, the Romantics, despite the belief that 'unconscious and organic form is significant', use the imagination to heal the gap between the mind and nature. About self-consciousness and its relation to art, Hartman asserts: 'Though every age may find its own means to convert self-consciousness into the larger energy of imagination, in the Romantic period it is primarily art on which this crucial function devolves'. [72] Self-consciousness stimulates and encourages the imagination to search for an interacting unity between self and life. This is also illustrated by Coleridge when he describes the secondary imagination as 'co-existing with the conscious will' to reconcile opposites. But Helen Regueiro, quoting Hartman's arguments from 'Romanticism and Anti-Self-Consciousness', develops a different argument. According to Regueiro, the 'limits of imagination' lie in the dialectical relationship of imagination and reality in relation to the loss of the unselfconscious nature of the imagination. Since the imagination is intimately associated with self-consciousness, the movement towards the oneness of self and the outside world 'is paradoxically a movement inward that intensifies rather than resolves the dialectic, often leading to the ultimate estrangement: a solipsistic universe'. [73] Regueiro seems to suggest that the self-conscious activity of the

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[72] To quote Hartman's arguments about 'self-consciousness',

> There is one remedy of great importance which is almost coterminous with art itself in the Romantic period. This remedy differs from certain traditional proposals linked to the religious control of the intellect . . . A particularly Romantic remedy, it is nonlimiting with respect to the mind. It seeks to draw the antidote to self-consciousness from consciousness itself. A way is to be found not to escape from or limit knowledge, but to convert it into an energy finer than intellectual. . . . Though every age may find its own means to convert self-consciousness into the larger energy of imagination, in the Romantic period it is primarily art on which this crucial function devolves.

Geoffrey H. Hartman, 'Romanticism and Anti-Self-Consciousness' in Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays 1958-1970 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1970) 299-305.

[73] Helen Regueiro argues as follows:

> . . . the imagination, as the German romantics have shown us, is itself intimately linked with self-consciousness, so that the movement of transcendence is paradoxically a movement inward that intensifies rather than resolves the dialectic, often leading to the ultimate estrangement: a solipsistic universe, or poetic silence, that is, poetic death.

Helen Regueiro, The Limits of Imagination: Wordsworth, Yeats, and Stevens (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1976) 10.

imagination leads to solipsism. But Hartman's positive arguments suggest that to have a balancing unity of the imagination with nature, the self-conscious activity of the imagination is necessary to work on nature in the first place. The Romantics, making productive use of self-consciousness, try to fill the gap between the imagination and reality. It is self-consciousness which precludes the poets from falling into solipsism. Without the self-conscious activity of the imagination, Wordsworth could not create a fiction of 'Tintern Abbey', neither could the Romantics knowingly deconstruct.

Owing to her sceptical view of the self-conscious activity of the imagination, Regueiro seems to overlook an interesting linkage between Romanticism and Stevens. The self-conscious activity of the imagination develops from reconciling the mind and reality in Romantic poetry to creating the mind's reality in fiction in modern poetry. When Regueiro indicates 'a trend in contemporary criticism to discard the categories of imagination and reality as valid critical terms and to view the relationships posited by the poem as existing within the poem itself', her comment reveals that the trend reflects the mode of modern poetry after Romanticism. In Romanticism the reconciliation between subject and object was questioned. But in modern poetry, from the critical view, the reconciliation between imagination and what is imagined is questioned. It is a change that can be witnessed in the dialectical struggle within the poem itself. Regueiro continues, 'Paul de Man affirms the "literarity" of the text by suggesting that the relationship in question is not one between subject and object but between subjects: "The relationship with nature has been superseded by an intersubjective, interpersonal relationship that, in the last analysis, is a relationship of the subject toward itself".[74] By working the self-conscious activity of the imagination, the poet 'conceives of poetry as figuration' to create fiction. Quoting Joseph Riddel's argument, 'that the act of poetry is a thing itself, that "things as they are" *are* only when contained in a mind, or married to mind in a poem', Regueiro comments,

This kind of criticism seems at first glance to be particularly suited to

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[74] Regueiro 13.

> Stevens, since he claims repeatedly that "it is a world of words to the end of it", that the imagination is "the one reality / In this imagined world". It may indeed be argued that there are no poetic encounters of imagination and reality (logically there could not be), but encounters of images whose complex configurations constitute the experience of the poem. We may then argue that language is the only reality that poetry can lay claim to. This, too, is the case. Yet poetry struggles against the referential nature of the language that constitutes it, so that in effect it validates the dialectical approach which its apparent self-containment simultaneously brings into question. Perhaps in spite of themselves these poets argue for an imaginative world that exists within itself, and in which reality is itself figuration.[75]

The working of the self-conscious activity of the imagination is used by Stevens to create fictions that seek to solve the contradictory relationship between the imagination and reality in Romanticism. Stevens, in contrast with the Romantics, openly admits fiction as a poetic creativity and takes a different view of the dialectical relationship of imagination and reality. For him, reality lies in the imaginative world. Stevens expounds a theory of poetry that emphasises the link between the creative activity of poetic imagination and reality. Reality must not give way to a visionary world, to that wish-fulfilment which Stevens labels as 'the romantic' in the pejorative sense. Stevens insists that 'reality is the central reference for poetry'.[76] It is because poetry 'touches the sense of reality, it enhances the sense of reality, heightens it, intensifies it'.[77] The solution to Romantic problems with imagination becomes the key to the new Romanticism which Stevens tries to create.

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[75] Regueiro 14-15.
[76] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 71.
[77] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 77.

Chapter 2: Stevens's Response to Romanticism: Shelley and Keats

The preceding chapter considered the attempts made by Coleridge and Wordsworth to substantiate in poetry philosophical speculation concerning poetic communion with nature. Percy Bysshe Shelley also explores the possibility of creative activity through the imagination and recognises its attendant limitations. In contrast to T. S. Eliot who often writes unfavourably about Shelley,[1] Stevens quotes approvingly from Shelley's A Defence of Poetry (1821) in 'The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet': 'Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be "the expression of the Imagination"'. According to Shelley, it is 'created by that imperial faculty, whose throne is curtained within the invisible nature of man. And this springs from the nature itself of language'. Stevens, quoting these words, tries to define poetry as Shelley did. After pointing out Shelley's remark, 'A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth', Stevens continues to quote: 'Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge . . . the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds . . . it arrests the vanishing apparitions which haunt the interlunations of life.'[2] We can see, hinted at in these extracts from A Defence of Poetry, how Stevens agrees with Shelley's view of poetry. Shelley believes in the 'imperial faculty' or the power of the imagination to perceive the ideal and tries to create it in the concrete form that poetry alone can give. Shelley as well as other Romantics regards poetry as a divine product. This quasi-sacred if secular view of poetry is also shared by Stevens who claims, 'After one has abandoned a belief in god,

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[1] Eliot says,

> It is not so much that thirty years ago I was able to read Shelley under an illusion which experience has dissipated, as that because the question of belief or disbelief did not arise I was in a much better position to enjoy poetry.

T. S. Eliot, 'Shelley and Keats' in The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933; Cambridge. Mass.: Harvard UP, 1961) 88.

[2] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 44.

poetry is that essence which takes its place as life's redemption'.[3] This is noted by Robert Bertholf who says: 'working out a poetry of approximate images that evokes the visionary experience of the holy, and which develops as a process of self-creation in the act of the mind realizing its attunement with a greater spiritual world' places Stevens as well as Shelley 'at the very heart of the Romantic in literature'. Bertholf suggests that release from the domination of fixed doctrines of belief enabled the Romantics to have a free interpretation of the world and the mind by approaching reality without preconceptions.[4] The secular theodicy suggested by Bertholf corresponds with Abrams's view on the Romantics which was noted in the beginning of the first chapter. Abrams argued that the Romantics employ imagination, a quasi-divine faculty, to overcome the sense of man's separation from the external world.

The epistemological problem of the Romantics lies in embodying in language what the mind envisions. It is because they feel the gap between what they envision and the capacity of poetic language to represent it. But it is one of the Romantics' characteristics that, despite their acknowledgement of this gap, by self-consciously working the imagination they seek boldly to fill it. Stevens gives a good account of Shelley's ideas on poetry as 'the centre and circumference of knowledge'. He writes: 'As a consequence it is easy for us to propose a center of poetry, a *vis* or *noeud vital*, to which, in the absence of a definition, all the variations of definition are peripheral.'[5] In other words, in spite of the absence of a definition, peripheral matters or approximations help us to recognise poetry as a 'centre'. This flexible way of representing the object offers a clue to solving the artistic problem in Romanticism. What has to be noticed is that, for all their differences, the two poets share a belief that what cannot be named lies close to the

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[3] Stevens, 'Adagia' in Opus Posthumous 186.

[4] Robert Bertholf, 'Shelley, Stevens, and Robert Duncan: The Poetry of Approximations' in Artful Thunder, Versions of the Romantic Tradition in American Literature in Honor of Howard P. Vincent, ed. Robert J. DeMott and Sanford E. Marovits (N.p.: The Kent State UP, 1975) 270.

[5] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 44-45.

centre of poetry. Stevens, like Shelley, seeks, through poetry, to bridge the disparity between the object and his description of the object. However, Stevens goes beyond Shelley since Shelley is more discouraged than Stevens by the elusiveness of imaginative experience.

In 'Bouquet of Belle Scavoir' Stevens dramatises the incapacity of the words to create what the poet perceives.

I

It is she alone that matters.
She made it. It is easy to say
The figures of speech, as why she chose
This dark, particular rose.

II

Everything in it is herself.
Yet the freshness of the leaves, the burn
Of the colors, are tinsel changes,
Out of the changes of both light and dew

III

How often had he walked
Beneath summer and the sky
To receive her shadow into his mind . . .
Miserable that it was not she. (*CP*, 231) [6]

Though the presence that the poet desires to describe exists through 'figures of speech', the poet only receives 'her shadow into his mind'. It is very hard to describe her mysterious presence; owing to the mutable change in nature – dew is

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[6] Wallace Stevens, The Collected Poems by Wallace Stevens (New York: Knopf, 1954. Reprint. NY: Vintage, 1982). Hereafter references to The Collected Poems will appear, with appropriate page numbers, in the text, with the abbreviation *CP*. Since the date for each poem is from Holly Stevens's edition, The Palm of the End of the Mind: Selected Poems and a Play by Wallace Stevens (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), I cannot identify whether it is the publication date or the composed date. According to her, 'They [The poems] have been arranged in chronological order, determined from manuscript evidence, correspondence, or date of publication. It should be noted, however, that poems dated only by publication must have been written earlier . . .'. 'Bouquet of Belle Scavoir' cannot be found in Holly Stevens's edition but in The Collected Poems.

glistening on the rose and the leaves in the light – it is almost impossible to recapture the mental image of her changing every moment. The difference between the imagined and the real is allegorised in the loss of his love.

IV

The sky is too blue, the earth too wide.
The thought of her takes her away.
The form of her in something else
Is not enough.

V

The reflection of her here, and then there,
Is another shadow, another evasion,
Another denial. If she is everywhere,
She is nowhere, to him. (*CP*, 231)

The 'figures of speech' is only the reproduction of 'the form of her in something else'. As Robert Pack says, 'Each reminiscence of her only emphasizes the fact that she is not there and each thought of her intensifies the pang in the realization of her absence'.[7]

VI

But this she has made. If it is
Another image, it is one she has made.
It is she that he wants, to look at directly,
Someone before him to see and to know. (*CP*, 232)

The moment the poet describes the image of her, it is perceived as an absence. Within the pastness of the poetic product there remains a vestige of her presence, which should be imagined.

The image-making is very similar to the activity of God who 'created man in his own image' (Genesis, 1. 27). But for the human poet, to attain a point of contact between the imagined and the real, it is essential to have an immediate experience

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[7] Robert Pack, Wallace Stevens: An Approach to his Poetry and Thought (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1958) 176.

since 'It is she that he wants, to look at directly, / Someone before him to see and to know'. Pack explains, 'All material existence has its extension in the imagination, and only then does it truly exist.'[8] The imaginative presence assumes the sense of reality through the imaginative experience of the mind's reality. The problem is that the process of poetic activity entails reaching the limits of language in the act of expressing what is envisioned. Though each reflection just creates 'another shadow, another evasion, / Another denial', 'this she has made'. 'If it is / Another image, it is one she has made'. We cannot restrict what is imagined to a single description; otherwise, the image falls into a stale representation.

The Romantic quest for a reconciliation which could be gained through embodying the continuity of imagination and the visible world is achieved by Stevens. Stevens also feels the incapacity of language fully to describe the presence that he desires and this artistic problem leads him to explore how to represent the imaginative experience. Poetry as a creative utterance 'arrests the vanishing apparitions which haunt the interlunations of life', as Shelley says in a passage quoted by Stevens. What makes Stevens different from Shelley, despite their similar view on poetry, is illustrated in 'Bouquet of Belle Scavoir', a modern version of the Romantic quest. Stevens suggests in the poem, as a solution of the artistic problem, the need for flexible representation of what fascinates the imagination. Stevens, who knows that 'in the absence of a definition, all the variations of definition are peripheral' to a 'center of poetry', does not deny the difficulty of restoring her presence in language. And Stevens had a different poetic space for the creative activity of the imagination from Shelley: the former finds it in reality; the latter finds it in ideals beyond this world. Though it is a strength of his poetry that it makes us sharply conscious of the gap between the ideal and the real, we may doubt whether Shelley can fill the gap. Or we may feel that it is Shelley himself who is sceptical about his idealism.[9] Stevens as well as Shelley

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[8] Pack 177.

[9] Baker indicates the complexity of Shelley's idealism.

> He [Stevens] connected Shelley, rightly, with the Platonic tradition as well as with its tragic flaw, the failure of the Platonic imagination to "adhere to what is real". For

attempts to overcome the inability to describe what the imagination experiences. To distinguish between Stevens and Shelley and to clarify Stevens's response to him, it is worthwhile examining closely the poetic characteristics of Shelley in some poems concerned with the difficulty of incarnation of poetic truth.

The story of Alastor (1816) is similar to Stevens's 'Bouquet of Belle Scavoir' since both poems treat the theme of the inevitable gap between the creations of the imagination and what is perceived as the truth. In the 'Preface' to the poem Shelley writes that the story 'may be considered as allegorical of one of the most interesting situations of the human mind'. He describes the situation of the human mind as follows:

> . . . So long as it is possible for his desires to point towards objects thus infinite and unmeasured, he is joyous, and tranquil, and self-possessed. But the period arrives when these objects cease to suffice. His mind is at length suddenly awakened and thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself. He images to himself the Being whom he loves . . . He seeks in vain for a prototype of his conception. Blasted by his disappointment, he descends to an untimely grave.

In the poem this situation of the human mind is allegorically described in the quest for the Veiled Maid by the youth at the cost of his life. The Veiled Maid who appeared to him in his dream symbolises the ideal prototype of everything he longs for; at the same time she is his muse: 'Her voice was like the voice of his own soul . . . / Herself a poet' (153-61)[10]. Therefore it can be said that the Veiled Maid

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> without the corrections that reality offers, the realm of imagination is always in danger of becoming a merely mind-made construct that cannot command our continuing interest.

Since Shelley's imaginative creation is desired to be associated with the metaphysical region, Baker suspects the validity of Shelley's idealism. He continues,

> The "fictive covering" that "weaves always glistening from the heart and mind" of poets like Shelley may be deceptive in that its fictitious aspects screen us away from needful association with the realities below or beyond it. (27-28)

[10] Percy Bysshe Shelley, Shelley's Poetry and Prose, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd ed. Norton Critical Edition (New York and London: Norton, 2002). References to Shelley's poetry and prose are to this edition with line numbers given in the text following the quotation.

personifies poetic inspiration in the symbolic form of an ideal woman. However, his aesthetic pleasure with her is transient. There is the inevitable corruption of the inspiration in the process of incarnation.

> . . . He eagerly pursues
> Beyond the realms of dream that fleeting shade;
> He overleaps the bounds. Alas! alas!
> Were limbs, and breath, and being intertwined
> Thus treacherously? Lost, lost, for ever lost,
> In the wide pathless desart of dim sleep,
> That beautiful shape! (205-11)

The youth, suffering from the fading of the dream, the return to reality, and the consequent sense of loss and despondency, begins an energetic but doomed quest for the ideal and unattainable beauty, which ends with his death.

The ideal beauty searched for in Alastor is also invoked in 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' (1816). Shelley's tone may seem devotional, but his mode is interrogative:

> Spirit of Beauty, that dost consecrate
> With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon
> Of human thought or form, - where art thou gone?
> Why dost thou pass away and leave our state,
> This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate?
> Ask why the sunlight not forever
> Weaves rainbows o'er yon mountain river,
> Why aught should fail and fade that once is shewn,
> Why fear and dream and death and birth
> Cast on the daylight of this earth
> Such gloom, - why man has such a scope
> For love and hate, despondency and hope? (13-24)
> [emphases added]

The central theme of the poem is that there exists a 'Spirit of Beauty' which Shelley seeks as his spiritual anchor. However, the 'Spirit of Beauty' remains

remote, capricious and unattainable. The repeated questions enhance the impact of the poet's lament over his unanswered prayers. The identification of the 'Spirit of Beauty' or 'Intellectual Beauty' is difficult since, as Judith Chernaik suggests, 'Shelley's subject is not a definition of "Intellectual Beauty" but an analysis of its relationship to human life, and to the poet who is its hierophant'.[11] What is clear about the poem, as Michael O'Neill indicates, is that 'Shelley constructs a faith in which to believe, while remaining fully aware of the extent to which his deity is capricious, arbitrary, a human projection'.[12] Shelley, who had rejected Christianity, has found a self-created deity or muse-figure whom he can adore and apostrophise in a poem that uses for its own purposes the conventions of a religious form, a hymn. He sings the praise of the 'Spirit of Beauty' and also pleads for communion with its disappearing presence.

The sense of loss is felt keenly by the Romantics. The imagination seeks a new synthesising vision through the reconciliation between the isolated self and nature. The search for reconciliation leads to theories of the imagination's working, shown by Shelley's essay, 'On Love' (1818). In the essay Shelley, in a discussion of human nature, describes Love as a natural tendency or a longing for an 'ideal' object. This yearning eros forces us to concretise the ideal prototype through the imagination. He says:

> We are born into the world and there is something within us which from the instant that we live and move thirsts after its likeness. . . . We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, . . . the ideal prototype of every thing excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man.

However, he continues: 'this is the invisible and unattainable point to which Love tends; and to attain which, it urges forth the powers of man to arrest the faintest shadow of that, without the possession of which there is no rest or respite to the

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[11] Judith Chernaik, The Lyrics of Shelley (Cleveland and London: P of Case Western Reserve U, 1972) 39.
[12] Michael O'Neill, The Human Mind's Imaginings: Conflict and Achievement in Shelley's Poetry (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 32.

heart over which it rules'. In poems such as Alastor and 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' the poet seeks 'the Being whom he loves' or the 'Spirit of Beauty' that stands apart from the physical world and man's heart. His strong desire for union with the 'Spirit of Beauty' is also bound up with the desire to rediscover an ideal union with the muse. And this must be done by the reification in verbal art of what the imagination seizes as the ideal. However, these poems reveal the poet's failure to create a language which will give form to what is imagined.

In Epipsychidion (1821) Shelley, again representing the muse as a perfect woman, tries to achieve an ideal union with her in poetry. By identifying his beloved with supreme images, Shelley represents her as an embodiment of ideal beauty. In the process of transfiguring her into the unearthly existence, she assumes the status of a muse-like existence since his poetic quest to find what the imagination craves is bound up with the life of the imagination. In his visionary dream Shelley seeks for her inwardly.

> Then I – "where?" – the world's echo answered "where!"
> And in that silence, and in my despair,
> I questioned every tongueless wind that flew
> Over my tower of mourning, if it knew
> Whither 'twas fled, this soul out of my soul; (234-38)

She is the separated half of his being, the 'soul out of my soul', and he is the lover who seeks reunion with her. Bornstein, applying the theory set out in the essay 'On Love' to the poem, argues that the loving union in Shelley's poetic quest is an idealised form for the complete self since he believes that the mind consists of the 'ideal prototype' of himself or the epipsyche, and the psyche which aspires to join its completely purified counterpart.[13] However, when the harmonious union is

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[13] Bornstein interprets the epipsyche as 'essentially the same as the psyche, only purged of impurities'. It is because 'the lady is a perfected version of a nascent form within the lover himself'. To support his argument, Bornstein quotes the following lines from 'On Love'.

> We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of every thing excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man.

George Bornstein, Yeats and Shelley (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1970) 146.

fulfilled in an island paradise which is secluded from reality, it ends with a solipsistic immersion in a dream vision. The imaginative indulgence in a dream vision shows another example of what Stevens considers to be the Romantic in a pejorative sense. Though Stevens shares with Shelley a belief in poetry's capacity to produce a sense of continuity between his own imagination and the visible world, their positions are starkly at odds: Stevens cannot accept Shelley's solipsistic imagination which does not adhere to reality.

In the essay 'On Love' Shelley also describes the 'ideal prototype' as 'a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness: a soul within our soul'. And he believes it is through the imagination that he can concretise the 'ideal prototype'. However the 'ideal prototype' is too pure to be described in words. Though the imagination envisions the 'ideal prototype', the limits of language preclude the imagination from expressing the 'ideal prototype' in poetry. This is deplored in Epipsychidion.

> Woe is me!
> The winged words on which my soul would pierce
> Into the height of love's rare Universe,
> Are chains of lead around its flight of fire. –
> I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire! (587-91)

O'Neill suggests that 'the poetry's sense of its own inadequacy provokes a bravura show of self-deconstruction'. With the help of the creative imagination we can give poetic expression to the vision; however, ironically 'words are inadequate; even as they help the soul pierce into Love's universe, they become "chains of lead" which the poet must repudiate or else fail in his quest. "The deep truth", Shelley recognized in Prometheus Unbound, "is imageless"'.[14] O'Neill goes on to say, 'The disintegration but partial redemption of the poem's hope is marked by the fourfold use of the first person in line 591. Perhaps the self cannot be one with the desired other. Yet, in the act of dramatizing this poem's expiration, Shelley sustains the possibility that, despite the failing of the self, the ideal still survives, albeit in a

[14] Bornstein, Yeats and Shelley 151.

form unattainable through words.'[15] Here again the artistic representation faces and arguably thrives on the difficulty of incarnating experience in words. Though Shelley sustains his belief in the ideal, the intermittent inability of words to represent it makes his poetry precarious. As we have observed, the subject of Shelley's poetry is about recapturing ideals which exist in a metaphysical world. Stevens does not share such a vision of the purpose of poetry. Still, despite his argument with Shelleyan idealism, Stevens reads him with an alertness to the intelligence shown in the poetry, and to the presence in the work of what Rajan, writing about Shelley, calls 'a suppressed debate between his idealism and his skepticism'.[16]

Shelley repeatedly tries to commune with ideal beauty in order to fill the gap between the physical world and spiritual world through poetic imagination. Ironically, however, the very power of poetry with which the poet tries to concretize the ideal prototype does not ensure the permanence of the latter. The poet is deserted by the ideal beauty, which is forever sought and forever lost, as Rousseau says of the 'shape all light' (352) in 'The Triumph of Life'.[17] In A Defence of Poetry Shelley charts his exalted but also sceptical views about poetic imagination. The declining power of the imagination cannot revive what Shelley desires.

> The mind in creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness: this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results: but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the

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[15] Michael O'Neill, Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) 143.

[16] Rajan 83.

[17] Shelley describes the 'shape all light' as 'A light from Heaven whose half extinguished beam / "Through the sick day in which we wake to weep / Glimmers, forever sought, forever lost.' (429-33)

world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conception of the poet.

Angela Leighton, quoting these lines, explains:

> Composition cannot recover the original brightness of inspiration, but rather begins to lose it from the start. Although the 'fading coal' of the mind is briefly fired again, as by 'an inconstant wind', composition itself is only gained at the expense of inspiration. Writing is thus by its very nature a process of loss.[18]

The power of poetry from its inception wanes to extinction, reducing it to ashes. The poet cannot actually achieve an ideal co-existence of word and experience and ends by only expressing desire for such a co-existence.[19] A Defence of Poetry, to borrow Leighton's phrase, 'contains the curious paradox that, while Poetry in its ideal state is inspiration, poems are the loss of inspiration'.[20] The artistic problem lies in 'an inadequate representation of that Power which first inspires it . . . As a result, words remain isolated by a sense of their own loss. Without the continued pressure of inspiration, the sublime poem risks becoming "mere" rhetoric'.[21] Or to put it another way, without the self-conscious activity of the imagination, the poet fails to sustain inspiration. Stevens, who also acknowledges the difficulty of composition as we witnessed in 'Bouquet of Belle Scavoir', seeks to rescue poetry from becoming merely rhetorical expression. His attempts to overcome this artistic problem leads to his new Romanticism.

Shelley's scepticism also develops through his difficulty in accepting the negative aspects of this world. In 'On Love' he says his imaginative mirror 'reflects only the forms of purity and brightness: a soul within our soul that describes a

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[18] Angela Leighton, Shelley and the Sublime: An Interpretation of the Major Poems (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 45.

[19] Bertholf indicates Shelley's artistic problem which can be also witnessed in 'To a Skylark',

> And in "To a Skylark", which takes the unseen bird as an emblem of the presence of wholeness, Shelley works through a series of analogies introduced by "like" – "Like a high-born maiden", "Like a glow-worm golden", "Like a rose embowered" – that demonstrates the frustrating leakages words contain. In this series, each analogy becomes an approximation, or a projection of a possible means of bringing into visible form the invisible source of musical harmony. (271)

[20] Leighton 47.

[21] Leighton 46.

circle around its proper Paradise which pain and sorrow and evil dare not overleap'. This is because he inclines instinctively towards the ideal and flinches from the real, but, for Stevens, without the affirmation of the real, it is impossible to reconcile the two realms. Without this reconciliation Shelley's poetry risks a lack of content and operates only in the art of rhetoric. When Stevens demands that poetry be founded on realities in the living world, he does not exclude from his vision the pains and miseries that are part of reality. Therefore Stevens is more favourably disposed towards Keats, who struggled to achieve a balanced view of life, one which included both positive and negative aspects of reality. Shelley's exclusion of the real reflects the fate of the youth in Alastor. The youth could not realise the object of his quest in the actual world. He sought in vain for the ideal prototype of his conception. Blasted by his disappointment, 'he knew that death / Was on him' (626-27).

> Hope and despair,
> The torturers, slept; no mortal pain or fear
> Marred his repose, the influxes of sense,
> And his own being unalloyed by pain,
> Yet feebler and more feeble, calmly fed
> The stream of thought, till he lay breathing there
> At peace, and faintly smiling: - (639-45)

In his smiling face, as Stuart M. Sperry puts it, we can suppose that 'the Poet is granted one last glimpse of the ideal he has so faithfully pursued'.[22] It is death that liberates him from the tortures of his quest for the unattainable and grants him to attain the object of the quest in life.

As we observed in Alastor, 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and Epipsychidion, the theme of these poems lies in the difficulty of shaping fleeting visions into concrete forms. Shelley, who knows the limits of the poetic imagination, faithfully represents his desire for the communion with the ideal and its failure in a series of

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[22] Stuart M. Sperry, Shelley's Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry (Cambridge. MA: Harvard UP, 1988) 37.

well-nigh tragic scenarios. The epistemological problem is again treated in 'Mont Blanc' (1816) where the poetic space for the quest for unattainable beauty is transferred to the phenomenal world from the ideal world in Alastor and 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty'. In 'Mont Blanc' Shelley tries to dissolve the boundary between the physical world and spiritual world. Seeking the world-spirit which rules the universe in natural phenomena, Shelley attempts to concretise it into words. Shelley, astonished by the grandeur of Mont Blanc and at the same time horrified by its 'untameable wildness and inaccessible solemnity',[23] 'struggles with the epistemological questions that dominate the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge, the meaning of nature, the relation of mind to nature and to the power embodied in nature'.[24]

Through the exploration of the relation between the human mind and the universe, between subject and object, Shelley tries to encode nature's 'mysterious tongue' (76).

> Thy caverns echoing to the Arve's commotion,
> A loud, lone sound no other sound can tame;
> Thou art pervaded with that ceaseless motion,
> Thou art the path of that unresting sound –
> Dizzy Ravine! and when I gaze on thee
> I seem as in a trance sublime and strange
> To muse on my own separate phantasy,
> My own, my human mind, which passively
> Now renders and receives fast influencings,
> Holding an unremitting interchange
> With the clear universe of things around; (30-40)

Though the unattainable object the poet desires to transfer into words can be grasped as only a 'separate phantasy', he tries to sustain the 'unremitting

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[23] See Mary Shelley and P. B. Shelley, 'Preface' in History of a Six Weeks' Tour 1817 (Oxford: Woodstock, 1989) vi.
[24] Chernaik 47.

interchange / With the clear universe of things around'. The things surrounding him compose the 'clear universe' which is close to the spiritual world for the ideal to inhabit. However, the communion with the Nature of Mont Blanc is not easily attained owing to the intricate relationship between the human mind and the universe.

According to O'Neill,

> In its otherness it [the ravine of Arve] prompts in Shelley the discovery that mind is distinct from object, that the object can never be fully drawn up into the mind, that language can only stand in for objects. . . . Shelley's language enacts his fascination with the indeterminate relationship between mind and world. This fascination gives rise to the paradox of lines 37-8, where he presents his own mind as '*passively*' (my italics) rendering as well as receiving 'fast influencings', as if the mind were, in part, not the creator of the thoughts that it sends beyond itself.[25]

While the poet passively responds to the influence from Mont Blanc, he also seeks to hold a reciprocal communion with it. The problem is that the poet's bewilderment at Mont Blanc and the loss of confidence in 'holding an unremitting interchange' result in ambiguous statement since the passive mind's ability to render and receive the influence of the universe seems to coexist with, or even to undermine, the active mind's ability to hold an 'unremitting interchange'. Shelley cannot regard the mountain as a merely natural object owing to its inaccessible solemnity. For him Mont Blanc becomes a cosmic intellectual principle with which he has a strong desire to commune. However, we are troubled, as O'Neill suggests, by the ambiguous state of the mind which cannot be identified as either passively or actively working. This leads us to doubt whether Shelley can concretise the symbolic significance of the Power ruling the universe in the material object of Mont Blanc.

The passive communion reminds us of Shelley's statement in A Defence of Poetry, where he compares the Aeolian lyre to the poet. In the preceding chapter

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[25] O'Neill, The Human Mind's Imaginings 44.

we have seen Abrams indicate the symbolic function of the Aeolian lyre in Romanticism, mentioning Shelley. And it is useful to quote Shelley's own statement.

> Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be "the expression of the Imagination": and poetry is connate with the origin of man. Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Æolian lyre, which move it by their motion to ever-changing melody. But there is a principle within the human being, and perhaps within all sentient beings, which acts otherwise than in the lyre, and produces not melody, alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds or motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them.

Shelley explains poetry as a joint product of the external and the internal. The mind of the poet passively responds to the external and through the internal adjustment to it produces a harmonious union with nature. The passive surrender to the external gives an impression that the imagination is not successfully reconciled with reality. But, as Leighton suggests, 'The mind is not passive but actively attuned to the influence of these Humean "impressions"'.[26] Like Wordsworth's 'wise passiveness'[27] and Keats's 'Negative Capability', a poetic passivity is an important factor in responding to things as they are. The problem is that the reciprocal communion cannot work in the presence of a natural form and force such as Mont Blanc.

As we shall see in the next chapter, in the similar vacant landscape of Stevens's 'The Snow Man', barrenness becomes the necessary condition for the imagination to renew the perceived experience and to have a possible plenitude in the new

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[26] Leighton 114.

[27] Wordsworth describes the wisdom which he believes he can gain from direct contact with nature in 'Expostulation and Reply' (1798).

> Nor less I deem that there are powers,
> Which of themselves our minds impress,
> That we can feed this mind of ours,
> In a wise passiveness. (21-24)

poetic creativity. A significant difference between the Romantic and the modern lies in their attitude towards the reality of nature. While Shelley regards the barrenness as difficult to cope with, it becomes for Stevens the stage on which the poetic act takes place. Shelley's imagination cannot supply fictive covering to a barren nature. Though Shelley, as we observed, compares poetic passivity to the Aeolian lyre and values the harmonious communion with the outside world 'by an internal adjustment of the sounds or motions', he seems conscious of the problematic distance between the imagination and the unapproachable world of Mont Blanc which the imagination tries to reach, and fails to accept the reality of Mont Blanc as it is.

The challenging mood is toned down as he senses that the reciprocal communion is not active enough and the inability of the imagination to perceive the natural world.

> The secret strength of things
> Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome
> Of heaven is as a law, inhabits thee!
> And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,
> If to the human mind's imaginings
> Silence and solitude were vacancy? (139-44)

The landscape of Mont Blanc presents itself in a way that makes it self-sufficient and hard to be explained by 'the human mind's imaginings'. Shelley tries to fill the gap between the two opposites, man and nature or the human imagination and the absolute reality even if Mont Blanc's 'secret strength of things' perplexes. Chernaik as well as Timothy Webb gives a sympathetic view of Shelley. According to the former, Shelley recognises that 'there is an absolute division between the world of man and the power that wields all things'. And despite this gulf, the two realms can be bridged with the mind's imaginings. 'The poet's function is to experience and to know what cannot be seen or heard, to create in language the forms his imagination craves.'[28] The latter also takes a similar view. Webb

[28] Chernaik 46.

indicates that nature is oracular for Shelley and speaks in a 'mysterious tongue' (76) which is not understood by all. He continues, 'The centre of power is located in man himself; only the specially gifted can unriddle the meaning of the oracle and their understanding is intimately linked to their ability to feel'.[29] However, conscious of his mission to encode the 'mysterious tongue', a suspicion that the 'human mind's imaginings' are unable to compete with the barren landscape of the natural world crossed the poet's mind. Therefore he doubts the capacity of the imagination and wonders if he could have any possibility of filling the gap between the two terms.

What we can find in the poem is Shelley's attempt to fill the gap between representation by verbal art and reality but not the solution. It may be assumed that if Shelley actively had worked upon Mont Blanc, he could have filled the gap through the communion with it. Or rather we may say that Shelley deliberately might have left the solution open in order not to fix the image of Mont Blanc through language but to stimulate and enrich our imagination. O'Neill argues:

> The final question ('And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea, / If to the human mind's imaginings / Silence and solitude were vacancy?' (142-4)) is poised between celebration of the poem's 'imaginings' and awareness that if one can imagine in a way that bestows meaning, one can also do so in a way that allows meaning to topple back into the 'vacancy' which is its perpetual shadow. The fact that meaning and meaninglessness are alike constructions of 'the human mind's imaginings' is the most compelling implication here, and is signalled by 'And' where one might expect 'But' in the antepenultimate line.[30]

'The fact that meaning and meaninglessness are alike constructions of "the human mind's imaginings"' shows Shelley's awareness of the intricate relation between art and reality. Thus Shelley, rejecting any naïve belief in the ideal representation of art, challenges the limit of the imagination. Therefore, the final lines of the poem

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[29] Timothy Webb, Shelley: A Voice Not Understood (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1977) 138.

[30] O'Neill, Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem 149.

give us a sense of the poet's affirmation as well as doubt of the capacity of the human mind's imaginings to bridge the distance between itself and material reality.

Shelley's exploration of the unresolved relationship of imagination to truth continues to preoccupy him. Shelley shows a defiant attitude towards the 'uncontrollable' (47) wind in 'Ode to the West Wind' (1820). As we have observed in the preceding chapter, in contrast to Coleridge's failure in his performance on the aeolian harp, Shelley exhibits dynamism in his daring poetic activity.

> Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
> What if my leaves are falling like its own!
> The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
>
> Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
> Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
> My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!
>
> Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
> Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
> And, by the incantation of this verse,
>
> Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
> Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
> Be through my lips to unawakened Earth
>
> The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
> If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind? (57-70)

The theme of the poem is symbolised in the destruction and regeneration of the power of the wind, which works not just as a 'Destroyer' but also as a 'Preserver', sweeping away dead leaves and fostering new life. The poet 'asks to be able to channel the Power of the wind through his own tuned strings: through the self

which proclaims its readiness to be inspired and prophetic'.[31] The repeated use of the imperative mood represents the poet's strong pleas for poetic inspiration from the west wind, thus becoming an impetuous drive to share its 'mighty harmonies'. Seeking inspiration from the powerful energy of the wind – 'Make me thy lyre' – shows the poet's active communion with nature. And the *terza rima* form helps to give the sense of speed and urgency in the movement of the poem.

Though the assertion of the creative self is evident in the poem, the artistic problem casts a shadow on the assertion. To quote Leighton's words again,

> As always for Shelley, 'dramatic confrontation' with the invisible Power takes the form of an overwhelming question as to how such a Power can be imaged if it is imageless, or imagined if it is unimaginable. The language of the 'Ode to the West Wind' acts out this problem of gain and loss.[32]

The poem, which consists of optative sentences and ends with a question mark, also gives us a sense of doubt that, contrary to the poet's desire, he cannot wipe away a shadowy pessimism. As one of the 'unacknowledged legislators of the World', the phrase with which Shelley ends A Defence of Poetry, he feels a kind of mission to reform the world and believes that poetry can be a guiding principle for his audience, not through any didactic preaching, but through its imaginative impact. This sense of mission is a good reason to ask for poetic inspiration in 'Ode to the West Wind'. And we could find the sense of mission also working in 'Mont Blanc'. But the sense of mission is discouraged repeatedly by the formidable nature and then by the destructive force of life.

In his last unfinished poem 'The Triumph of Life' (1822) Shelley has a poetic vision which is far from the ideal and can be said to be destructive.[33] In this poem

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[31] Leighton 114.

[32] Leighton puts 'dramatic confrontation' in parentheses quoting from Irene H. Chayes, who says, 'It is especially the apostrophe which may be part of meditation or encomium, that brings together an inner state of mind and an external object and makes possible a dramatic confrontation' (107). The quotation is from Irene H. Chayes, 'Rhetoric as Drama: An Approach to the Romantic Ode', *PMLA*, 79, no.i (1964), 68.

[33] According to Rajan,

> Shelley moves toward an internalization of the destructive, Dionysiac element in

he transfers the poetic stage to a more severe condition than the barren landscape of Mont Blanc and seems to set, with some desperateness, the capacity of the imagination against the destructive force of life. His quest for the unattainable assumes a stoic attitude towards the object he searches for as well as towards himself. The visionary framework of the poem suggests to us that Shelley views this world as only a dream. Negating this world as a dream shows a crucial difference between Shelley and Stevens, who values earthly aesthetics.

The narrator's questions, 'Whence camest thou and whither goest thou? / How did thy course begin' (296-97) and then, 'What is Life?' (544), remind us of the same questions asked in 'On Life' (1819).

> What is life? Thoughts and feelings arise, with or without our will and we employ words to express them. We are born, and our birth is unremembered and our infancy remembered but in fragments. We live on, and in living we lose the apprehension of life. . . . For what are we? Whence do we come, and whither do we go? Is birth the commencement, is death the conclusion of our being? What is birth and death?

The loss of an origin always haunts Shelley, who also deplores the loss of the original conception in A Defence of Poetry: 'when composition begins inspiration is already on the decline'. Leighton attempts to find an answer to the questions which preoccupied Shelley's thought as follows:

> The question "What is life?" is one which leads to an important distinction between Life as a process and Life as an origin. It is the origin which Shelley desires to recover: the original intense 'apprehension of life' which we forget in 'living'.[34]

Shelley tries to answer his question about the original truth; however, tragically, the search for the origin is doomed to failure, enhancing the mood of scepticism. Though the poem is uncompleted, we cannot find any hope for the restoration of the origin, still less an implication of this.

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experience which is very far from those beautiful idealisms of moral excellence which his idealistic aesthetic theory claims it is the function of the poet to provide. (71)

[34] Leighton 152.

Shelley's desire for an origin beyond this world and his repeated use of the words 'shade' and 'shadow' tell us that we are merely the shadows of the original and live as and among shadows of life. Shelley's description of Rousseau's encounter with the 'shape all light' (352) shows that we are born into the common world of human experience and subject to the energetic progress of the Chariot of Life, losing the light of our origins. Sperry interprets the fading of the vision of the 'shape all light' thus: 'Life and its processes involve us in a world of shadows that progressively refract and obscure the true light of our origins.[35] And we experience the inevitability of this 'process' which is symbolised by the energetic progress of the triumphal pageant of the car: 'where'er / The chariot rolled a captive multitude / Was driven' (118-20). Even though we do not know its destination, we have no choice but to follow the procession, part of the 'perpetual flow / Of people' (298-99).

Being subject to the energy that propels all life is depicted as the triumph of life and its conqueror's pageant of life. Leighton writes

> It is this tension between Life as an imaginative origin and Life as a process of forgetting that origin, which underlies Shelley's last poem. *The Triumph of Life* refers to the triumph of that 'living' which jades the imagination and makes the poet forgetful of his first vision. The title thus expresses the poet's inevitable defeat by Life.[36]

The search for an origin that results only in exhaustion becomes a recurrent motif in Shelley's poetry. J. Hillis Miller indicates the obliteration of the origin as well as the consumption of creative energy as follows:

> . . . the poem puts a picture of human life as a discontinuous series of presents. Each of these violently cuts itself off from the past. It obliterates that past from memory . . . Each present moment consumes itself through the efforts of its own creative energy.[37]

What we can find in the poem is an energy of life which is being expended without

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[35] Sperry 200.
[36] Leighton 153.
[37] J. Hillis Miller, 'Shelley's "The Triumph of Life"' in Shelley, edited and introduced by Michael O'Neill, Longman Critical Reader Ser. (London: Longman, 1993) 229.

restoration. It propels us inevitably towards 'progressive diminutions and distortions'[38]. This destructive way of living life shows how the search for the ideal results only in the dissipation of life's energies.

Furthermore if we consider that the world surrounding the 'shape all light' is 'filled with many sounds woven into one / Oblivious melody' (340-41) and the references to 'music' (355, 369), 'song' (375) and 'measure' (377) in the description of the 'shape all light', we can relate the 'shape all light' to a muse as the personification of the poetic logos, reminding us of the ideal beauty in Alastor, the 'Spirit of Beauty' in 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and Epipsychidion. Despite his wish to create in language what the imagination craves, he cannot bridge the gap between the ideal and the real. The more Shelley has a strong sceptical view of the ideal, the more his imagination craves for communion with the unattainable. Therefore he drives himself to approach ideal perfection. His desire for the ideal also becomes the driving force to live life and this dynamism supports and enables him to pursue the ideal through the imagination. This reflects the urgency of the movement in the poem. Shelley wrote the poem without putting a pause at the ends of many tercets. This creates a sense of restless and quick movement. The speed and urgency of the movement, consuming the energy of life to the end, can be also witnessed in the destructive life of the youth in Alastor.

The hopeless distance from the ideal widens as Shelley negates the real. Through the development of his sceptical view of the ideal, he feels his limitations in filling in the gap. This enhances the tragic mood of his Dionysiac quest for the ideal beginning with Alastor and continued in 'The Triumph of Life'. Rajan takes the view that the coexistence of Shelley's scepticism with his idealism invites deconstruction.[39] It is difficult for him to incorporate the negative aspects of the real to realise his 'proper Paradise which pain and sorrow and evil dare not overleap'. The crucial difference between Stevens and Shelley lies in whether there is contact with, without diverging from, reality. Stevens tries to create his

[38] Sperry 189.
[39] Rajan 83.

poetic space out of the real, but, on the contrary, Shelley places a poetic space in the ideal which is separated from this world owing to the discords of the real which distort the light of the ideal. Despite the similarity we can find between Stevens and Shelley when they regard poetry as a creative agency to embody what the imagination seizes as poetic truth, the direction of Shelley's imagination is quite different from Stevens's. Shelley's poetic imagination, oriented towards a fallacious ideal, cannot come to terms with the real and fails to achieve a reconciliation between the two.

Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley, as we have seen, all found difficulty in their practice and theory of poetry. Nevertheless they believed in the power of the imagination and its function, which was compared by Coleridge to the creative activity of God. They were convinced that it is through the imagination that they can attain truth and reality. The same may be said of John Keats, who asserts the authenticity of the imagination in a letter dated 22 November 1817 as follows:

> I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination – What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth – whether it existed before or not – for I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty – . . . The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream – he awoke and found it truth. I am the more zealous in this affair, because I have never yet been able to perceive how any thing can be known for truth by consequitive reasoning.[40]

This famous pronouncement shows the poet's theory that he can reach the images of the 'essential Beauty' of things through the power of the imagination. This theory belongs to the Romantics and uses the idea that the imagination is an intermediary power which combines the finite with the infinite. However, in a letter dated 13 March 1818 Keats adopts a sceptical view of poetry: 'I am sometimes so very sceptical as to think Poetry itself a mere Jack a lantern to

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[40] Keats, The Letters of John Keats 1:184-85.

amuse whoever may chance to be struck with its brilliance.'[41] Keats is always conscious of the problem that the imagination may easily turn into a mere illusion. The contradictory nature of the imagination is repeatedly treated as a motif throughout his poetic career.

In The Odes of John Keats Vendler writes, 'As I became better and better acquainted with Stevens' poetry, I could hear behind many of his lines echoes of the odes of Keats'.[42] Considering that Stevens feels attracted to Keats's aesthetics which culminates in 'To Autumn', it is necessary to examine the development of the aesthetics which can be traced from his earlier writings. To understand the influence of Keats on Stevens and to find how Keats's poetic principle is incorporated into Stevens's poetry, though space is limited, I wish to examine the formation of Keats's aesthetics as fully as possible. Therefore, we shall now look more carefully into the subject.

The beginning of Keats's poetic activity is similar to Shelley's in that both of them quest for a union with what the imagination desires as the ideal beauty. In 'Endymion: A Poetic Romance' (1818)[43] the poet's quest for union with his muse is represented allegorically in the poetic romance of the young shepherd Endymion and the Moon-goddess, Cynthia in the world of myth. The poem offers, in Sperry's interpretation, a metaphor for poetic inspiration: 'Endymion's love for Cynthia is the expression of Keats's romance with his muse.'[44] By symbolising the moon as the power for inspiration to the poet, Keats with Endymion explores the springs of his imaginative life. However, the climactic ending of the heavenly marriage gives us a sense of doubt whether Endymion's permanent partnership with Cynthia in heaven only creates another version of the problem of solipsism. The union

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[41] Keats, The Letters of John Keats 1: 242.

[42] Helen Vendler, The Odes of John Keats (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap-Harvard UP, 1983) 6.

[43] Quotations from the poetry are from The Poems of John Keats, ed. Jack Stillinger (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1978), with lines numbers given in the text following the quotation.

[44] Stuart M. Sperry, Keats the Poet (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973) 103. We also would like to remember that the moon's influence on poetic imagination is described in the lines, 'O Maker of sweet poets, dear delight / Of this fair world' (116-17), in 'I stood tip-toe upon a little hill' (1817) written just before 'Endymion'.

between the muse and the poet, when it is realised in a fantasy completely separated from the earthly world or reality, ironically deconstructs his own affirmative postulate that he has accomplished his quest-romance for his muse in the most ideal shape for him. The ardent and poetic love for a life spent more in dream than in reality is the realisation of 'Adam's dream'. However, this disruptive element also implicitly reveals the poet's contradictory assumption that he has brought into existence a dream of poetry. Without the reconciliation between the realities of life and the dreams of poetry the imaginative product becomes a mere dream. Stevens's description of Romanticism as involving 'minor wish-fulfilments' is anticipated here.

The poet's sense of a conflict between the imaginative world and the real world is increased with the acknowledgement of hard realities, developing his scepticism towards the imagination. To achieve reconciliation between the imagination and reality becomes the central task of the great odes composed during a very short period (from April to May 1819). The representation of the poet's aesthetic appreciation takes the form of the ode, which leads the poet to address and praise his ideal objects such as the music of nature, an artefact and the profound sensuous experience of melancholy. The elements which constitute his particular conception of aesthetics as seen in the odes reveal his sense of the beauty of each object. And it is possible to argue that there is a close interconnection between the aesthetic viewpoints in the odes which finally culminate in 'To Autumn'. By tracing the development of Keats's aesthetics, we find that the poet values a crowning beauty in transience, admits both the sweet and bitter aspects of it, and finally accepts it as essential.

In the 'Ode to a Nightingale' Keats reaches the stage of appreciating a transient but exquisite beauty. Though the ode gives the impression that the whole poem is overflowing with a rhapsody over the charm of the nightingale's song, this lyrical quality of the ode is achieved through its intricate structure, consisting of the recurrent and varied interplay between the poet's raptured state and the tension generated by the threat of the bird's imminent possible departure. Intoxicated by

the rapturous song of the nightingale, Keats improvises about his ephemeral but intense sensuous experience. The poet is overwhelmed by the nightingale's joyous warbling and the urge towards self-extinction arises from the midst of this supreme happiness: 'Now more than ever seems it rich to die, / To cease upon the midnight with no pain, / While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad / In such an ecstasy!' (55-58). Since the nightingale's song is merely 'vocal without truth-content',[45] it simply gives sensations to the listener, ravishes the listener's ear rather than conveying any specifiable import. It is rather Keats's feeling of pain that colours the music to represent his pessimistic view of realities. Keats's state of mind, shocked by the gap between human pain and the nightingale's glad song, can be seen in the opening of the ode, which is predominantly negative in tone.

> My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
> My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
> Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
> One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:

The object to which he has recourse in order to indulge in the song of the nightingale is subtly shifted from 'a draught of vintage' (11) to 'a beaker full of the warm South, / Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene' (15-16), tacitly invoking the Muse for his poetic inspiration. Then desiring for an escape journey from being 'full of sorrow' (27), what the poet chooses is 'the viewless wings of Poesy' (33) – the imagination of poetry – on which he tries to follow the nightingale's singing voice into 'the forest dim' (20) to reach the acme of happiness. Ironically the crucial moment of the union with the nightingale is easily broken. Fearing the transience of imagination, Keats gives an ecstatic cry, 'Already with thee! tender is the night' (35). This suggests that since the relation between imagination and reality is a tense one and, therefore, thin, fragile and vulnerable, there is the premonition of the deceiving elf of Fancy which makes imagination break at any moment: 'Adieu!

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[45] Vendler, The Odes of John Keats 78.

the fancy cannot cheat so well / As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf' (73-74).

Keats experiences every passing moment to its very full all the more because his poetic imagination cannot be sustained in the passage of time and he is haunted by the fragility of intoxication. What Keats fears in the ode is the flimsiness of the imagination. As Keats is brought back to reality from the realm of imagination, he wonders whether this world is illusion or not. Such a feeling that he wants to regard the real world as an illusion can be seen in 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' (1819) where a Knight captured by an enchantress narrates his nightmarish dream: 'The latest dream I ever dream'd / On the cold hill's side. / . . . And I awoke, and found me here / On the cold hill's side'. In 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' and the ode the poet's recognition of the transitory nature of the imagination enhances the tension between the imagination and ultimate reality implying the difficulty of coexistence between them. However, in the ode in the tension between the peak of imaginative intensity and ultimate reality the poet finds an ecstatic pleasure with a strong sense of the transience of joy.

If the whole reality of this aesthetic experience were ordered into a fiction, the ode would be transformed into Stevens's 'The Idea of Order at Key West'. Though the nature of music is different in the sense that the nightingale's song is natural music and Stevens's song is fictive music, the motive for improvising these two poems can be said to be the same: intoxicated by the aesthetic pleasure in music, both poets composed their poems. Though the aesthetic experience is momentary, it creates an exquisite pleasure which becomes a spiritual nourishment. Stevens gives an order to the aesthetic experience, which is concretised in the fiction. On the other hand, owing to the solipsistic immersion in transient pleasure in the bird's song, the tone of the ode gives the superficial impression of an impromptu style or rhapsody. However, despite a negative aspect of the ode that Keats cannot come to terms with the reality into which he awakens, the poet's belief that beauty is essentially transitory is latently operative, and goes on to take various forms in 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', 'Ode on Melancholy' and 'To Autumn'.

In the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', Keats admits the mortal beauty and reveals the

deadlock of the urn's eternal beauty. In the ode the poet develops his imagination through the material urn as a medium and finally deepens his aesthetic value. Since the art object, a Grecian urn's mysterious and immediate presence keeps silence, the poet listens to the 'ditties of no tone' (14) not with the sensual ear but with the imagination, and attempts to reveal the hidden secrets of the urn to us through the poetic form of addressing himself directly to it. Keats's initial response to the urn is sensuous and even sensual. Fascinated by the presence of the urn, the poet questions it:

> What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
> Of deities or mortals, or of both,
> In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
> What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
> What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
> What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy? (5-10)

Finding the answers to the questions creates the process of the poet's recognition of the urn's nature. Keats actively shifts his focus to the imaginative inner life of the urn and grasps the essence of a thing through identifying with it.

> . . . more endeared
> . . . . . .
> Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
> Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
> Though winning near the goal – yet, do not grieve;
> She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
> For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!
>
> Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
> Your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu;
> And, happy melodist, unwearied,
> For ever piping songs for ever new;
> More happy love! more happy, happy love!

For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,

For ever panting, and for ever young; [emphases added]

All breathing human passion far above, (13-28)

The eternal world of the Grecian urn is directly opposite to the mutable world of the 'Ode to a Nightingale'. The contrast between them is shown by their rhetorical manoeuvres, which result in antithetical structures. The repeated use of the words 'ever', 'never', 'for ever' and 'for evermore' suggests that at the threshold of the next action the lovers maintain their instant of time forever and never experience fulfilment. The poet, putting himself in the place of the anguished lover, eagerly begins to crave richer sensation, as is shown by the impassioned exclamations – 'More happy love! more happy, happy love!'. But the lover's 'for ever panting' is contradicted by their being far above 'all breathing human passion'. Therefore, the repetition of the word 'happy' merely enhances the unsatisfied plight of the panting lovers.[46]

What the poet seizes by imagination is consummately represented by his descriptive form, and reveals the truth of the urn behind its fictitious beauty. Through his identification with the urn in an act of 'Negative Capability',[47] he recounts the experience of the urn and then reflects on it. While the form of his questions and the descriptions of the urn to answer the questions stimulate our imagination giving us a rich image of the urn, it also leads us to the truth of the urn and enables us to construct a context within which we can understand the much-discussed line, 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' (49). In short, the poet deliberately deconstructs the text's philosophical content and imposes upon us the

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[46] Kenneth Burke, saying, 'We shall analyze the Ode "dramatically", in terms of symbolic action', (447) indicates the 'paradox of the prime mover that is itself at rest, being the unmoved ground of all motion and action'(449). According to him, the paradoxical action at a standstill is 'a quality of *suspension* in the erotic imagery, defining an eternal prolongation of the state just prior to fulfilment – not exactly arrested ecstasy, but rather an arrested pre-ecstasy'(449-50). Burke's indication helps us to recognise the ironical plight for 'an arrested pre-ecstasy', giving us a doubt of the world of eternal beauty. A Grammar of Motives (Berkeley: U of California P, 1969).

[47] To contemplate a quiet and stationary object is in a sense to participate in things outside oneself, and thus this act assumes the characteristic nature of 'Negative Capability'.

poet's experience and its attendant questions and descriptions as materials which invite us to reconstruct the text. The notion that the urn lives in an infinite time was for Keats a desirable thing, but through his identification with the urn he is dissatisfied with the idea of unchanging beauty. The urn as a thing of beauty presents a fair appearance, but the real nature of the urn is remote from warm breathing life. The dual nature of the urn generates a contradictory response. And the structure of the double text converges in the maxim: 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'. The revelation of the true meaning of the message depends upon the appreciator's aesthetic sense.

The subject of the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' is the understanding of art and nature through imaginative perception. Through the contemplation of the unheard melodies of the urn, Keats who had the aesthetic experience of the transitory beauty in the 'Ode to a Nightingale' deepens his acknowledgement that the fictitious pleasures the poet experienced through his identification with the urn do not after all provide the warm sensuality he seeks. In the final stanza of the poem, disillusioned with the urn, the poet leaves it, and once again appreciates it in visually aesthetic terms. The shift in point of view is made clear with the first line of the last stanza by the apostrophe, 'O Attic shape! Fair attitude!' A gradual disengagement with the urn becomes definite with the words, 'Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought / As doth eternity'. The 'Attic shape' of the urn affords a sight of unequalled beauty, but the poet could not finally fuse his being with the urn in eternal bliss. The sweet unheard melodies turn into a 'Cold Pastoral!' (45).

Through some disguises, Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' appears in Stevens's poems. For example in 'Sunday Morning', the material from the ode is used for the boredom of unchanging reality in the eternal world.[48] And Stevens's 'Anecdote of the Jar' can be said to be an American version of Keats's ode. Showing the ordering process conferred by the Jar on nature, Stevens treats the problematic relationship between art and nature.[49] Keats's urn, for the sacrifice of the

[48] This subject is treated in Chapter 5.

[49] The ordering process described in 'Anecdote of the Jar' shows the dominance of art over reality. This question is taken up in the next chapter.

fulfilment of desires for eternal beauty, works as a medium providing truth and creating an order outside of the urn. Though the two poems have something in common in that through the artefact an order is found in the surroundings of the artefact or the evanescent life, the subjects treated by Stevens and Keats are slightly different. Stevens, showing the difficulty in balance between art and nature, questions how art should relate to nature. Keats's aesthetic concern lies in the affirmation of nature since the ode instigates a process of reflection which ends in the subordination of the eternal world of art to the sensual world.

Keats's conception of beauty as springing from an awareness of the transitory mingled with Melancholy and Pleasure forms the basis of his aesthetics in the 'Ode on Melancholy'. To achieve this stage it was necessary for him to go through the aesthetic experiences in the previous odes. In the ode the poet's quest begins with the yearning for true sensuous experience in Melancholy, which is a most powerful evocation of the fullness of reality and ends with his inescapable submission to the triumph of Melancholy, which comes as the crown of sorrow after Pleasure. Keats's sensuous exploration culminates in the last stanza:

> She dwells with Beauty – Beauty that must die;
> And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
> Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
> Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips:
> Ay, in the very temple of Delight
> Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
> Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
> Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;
> His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
> And be among her cloudy trophies hung.

Keats's aesthetics of transient beauty is condensed into the line: 'She dwells with Beauty – Beauty that must die'. Stevens rephrases the sentence into 'Death is the mother of beauty' in 'Sunday Morning', showing the same aesthetics as Keats's. One of the reasons that Stevens is attracted to Keats is that the same sense of

value is shared by them: they affirm the mutable nature of life and appreciate transient beauty in it.

In the 'Ode on Melancholy' the close relationship between Melancholy, Beauty, Joy and Pleasure characterises the nature of transitoriness. The culminating moment of tasting Joy's grape and its after-effect entailing the mood of melancholy show the fateful end of transitoriness mingled with Melancholy and Pleasure. Since Pleasure is inseparably bound up with Melancholy, the more intensely the poem's quester experiences Pleasure, the more he is forced to admit Melancholy's might. Pleasure's position as the inseparable reverse of Melancholy is also emphasised in 'aching Pleasure nigh, / Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips'. And the present participles in the last stanza – 'bidding', 'aching' and 'turning' – suggest life's quickness to change. The poet feels the urge to taste Joy's grape avidly to experience its frailty in the palate of the mind, and then enters Melancholy's shrine where his soul will be embodied in one of Melancholy's suspended trophies as the gospel of transitoriness. Mellor's reading of 'cloudy trophies' subtly raises a doubt about Keats's quest for sensual experience in transient pleasure. According to her, 'But since one remains a "cloudy" rather than a brilliantly shining trophy, Keats's original question – whether intenser appreciated beauty can compensate for or justify the agonies and strife of human hearts – remains open'.[50] Mellor's interpretation makes sense. However, considering that the poem is filled with a melancholic mood and cloudy images, we may also say that the 'cloudy trophies' are suitable to be Melancholy's triumph. Besides we must value Keats's attempt to justify and find compensation for the agonies of human experience.

The close relationship between Melancholy and Pleasure, which are usually considered to be in direct opposition, can be attributed to Keats's strong affirmation of life. In his letter on 'The vale of Soul-making'[51], he speaks of the

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[50] Mellor 86.

[51] In the letter dated 21 April 1819, Keats's well-known philosophy is mentioned as follows:

> . . . Call the world if you Please "The vale of Soul-making" Then you will find out the use of the world . . . I say '*Soul-making*' Soul as distinguished from an Intelligence . . .

vital nexus between quite opposite poles in experience and affirms the pains of life. The aim of the ode shows an austere affirmation of life: through experiencing pain and troubles and by overcoming the negative aspects of life, the soul is made strong enough to come to terms with life, nourishing itself. The submission to Melancholy and acceptance of being 'among her cloudy trophies hung' does not so much suggest poetic weakness as a recognition of the double-sided nature of human experience; the poet's full realisation of the 'wakeful anguish of the soul' (10) shows his strong eagerness for sensuous experience, an eagerness which drives his thinking in the odes.

Beckett says, 'The young Stevens was perhaps closer in spirit to Keats than to any other poet of the past'[52] and regards Stevens's poetic sensibility as possessing 'a distinctly Keatsian tang'. She also indicates that both of the poets, without the help of a structure of belief, considered the evils and sufferings of the real world to be an essential element: the negative aspects of life are for Keats 'the Minds Bible, the Minds experience' and for Stevens the necessary angel of reality.[53] Stevens, as we have seen, bases his poetry on reality to which the imagination must adhere as fundamental. He writes, 'the angel is the angel of reality. This is clear only if the reader is of the idea that we live in a world of the imagination, in which reality and contact with it are the great blessings'.[54] The affirmation of reality, despite man's mortality and his pains, is celebrated in poems by which the world is transformed through a new revelation. Stevens as well as Keats, with the absence of any

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> This point I sincerely wish to consider because I think it a grander system of salvation than the chryst<e>ain religion – or rather it is a system of Spirit-creation . . . Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways! Not merely is the Heart a Hornbook, It is the Minds Bible, it is the Minds experience . . .

When we think of Keats's religion or philosophy, we can find his own interpretation of the world based on his doctrine of the system of Soul-making, which puts emphasis on the importance of the 'Minds experience' which he acknowledges as too absolute a reality to coexist with. Inquiring into the truth, Keats came to be spiritually awakened through the 'vale of Soul-making'. Keats, The Letters of John Keats 2: 102-103.

[52] In his journal, Stevens mentions Keats. For example on 18 and 19 July 1899 at the age of twenty there are entries on 'Endymion'. See Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 28-29.

[53] Beckett 6-9.

[54] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 753.

specifically Christian feeling, regards poetry as something that might satisfy the need for belief.[55]

'The Fall of Hyperion' (1819), subtitled 'A Dream', has a visionary framework, within which Keats tries to represent his view of poetry more solemnly. The setting of the poem is macrocosmic, dealing with cosmogonic myth. On the level of the macrocosm Keats as a narrator participates in the annihilation and recreation of the world of the cosmogonic myth, and on the level of microcosm he too is reborn as a new mode of existence by resurrecting from the ordeals of ritual death that constitute the religious experience of initiation.

> One minute before death, my iced foot touch'd
> The lowest stair; and as it touch'd, life seem'd
> To pour in at the toes: I mounted up,
> As once fair angels on a ladder flew
> From the green turf to heaven. – "Holy Power",
> Cried I, approaching near the horned shrine,
> "What am I that should so be sav'd from death? (Canto I, 132-38)

The narrator of the poem, who succeeded in ascending the steps to the altar of Moneta, from her gains a kind of spiritual enlightenment.

> . . . Then saw I a wan face,
> Not pin'd by human sorrows, but bright blanch'd
> By an immortal sickness which kills not;
> It works a constant change, which happy death
> Can put no end to; deathwards progressing
> To no death was that visage; it had pass'd
> The lily and the snow; and beyond these
> I must not think now, though I saw that face –
> But for her eyes I should have fled away.
> They held me back, with a benignant light, (Canto I, 256-65)

Mellor's interpretation of this dramatic moment agrees with mine. The agonies of

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[55] In Chapter 4 I give a more detailed account of Stevens's view of poetry and religion.

immortal sickness and sorrows of Moneta's face that encompasses all human suffering become bearable to the narrator. It is because the beauty of Moneta's eyes

> fills him with wonder and comfort as he gazes upon it. These eyes so balance and focus the terrifying whiteness of Moneta's face that the poet can endure the total image: suffering is thus made acceptable because it is united with a defined image of beauty. Keats's pictorial imagination has here given us a visual fusion of agonizing pain and intense beauty, of destruction and creation. Thus this face is an icon of romantic irony.[56]

Despite Moneta's submission to eternal suffering, her eyes have the 'benignant light', in which the narrator finds a comfort and beauty. Moneta's stoical endurance is thus made acceptable as the justification for the human agonies which are inescapable and indispensable for the 'Minds experience'. By overcoming the negative aspects of life, the narrator can be a true poet: 'Whereon there grew / A power within me of enormous ken, / To see as a God sees, and take the depth / Of things as nimbly as the outward eye / Can size and shape pervade'. (Canto I, 302-6). The scenario of the rite de passage planned by Keats[57] illustrates the locus of his development in the poems. 'The Fall of Hyperion' fills a gap between the 'Ode on Melancholy' and 'To Autumn', revealing significant aspects of the mind of a poet who came to reconcile the realities of life with the dreams of poetry.

Vendler, as I have mentioned before, indicates, 'Throughout his long life as a poet, Stevens returned again and again to Keats' ode "To Autumn"'. Showing Keats's influence on Stevens, Vendler focuses her discussion on Keats's 'To

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[56] Mellor 103.

[57] Abrams draws attention to a rite de passage in 'The Fall of Hyperion'. Natural Supernaturalism 128. Mellor also indicating, 'Both in structure and in context, the poem is a rite de passage' (98), interprets the scene of the narrator's ascending the steps of the altar, 'A novice beginning the rituals of initiation, he must pass through a death-agony in order to "die into life", to enter a new self-consciousness'(102). Mircea Eliade's discussion on the cosmogonic myth and initiatory themes are very suggestive in relation to 'The Fall of Hyperion'. The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion (New York: Harcourt, 1959)

Autumn'.

> For Stevens, Keats' ode offered an antecedent model that proved irresistible, and I believe that Stevens hovered over the ode repeatedly in his musings. He became, to my way of thinking, the best reader of the ode, the most subtle interpreter of its rich meanings.[58]

Some critics as well as Vendler indicate Keats's influence on Stevens. Cook, in her discussion of Stevens's 'Sunday Morning', also shows a similar view to Vendler's, saying 'he [Stevens] is like the Romantic poet most congenial to him, Keats'.[59] Considering that 'To Autumn' forms the keynote of Stevens's poetic principle, we must draw attention to the verbal structure in which Keats's aesthetics is well reflected.

In 'To Autumn', the last of Keats's major 1819 odes, he reached his own full ripeness as a poet at last. Through the process of poetic contemplation of the relationship between the imagination and reality, art and nature, and eternity and transience in the previous odes, in 'To Autumn' these extremities are finally brought to harmonisation creating a complete oneness. In the letter dated 21 September 1819 the poet's motive for composing the ode is described:

> How beautiful the season is now – How fine the air. A temperate sharpness about it. Really, without joking, chaste weather – Dian skies – I never lik'd stubble fields so much as now – Aye better than the chilly green of the spring. Somehow a stubble plain looks warm – in the same way that some pictures look warm – this struck me so much in my sunday's walk that I composed upon it.[60]

In the poem we can sense that the poet's deep impression of the tranquil scene became engraved on his mind like an impressionistic painting. The poet communes with Autumn (as is obvious from the title of the ode beginning with 'to' and the style of apostrophe in the first stanza) and passes into art what he gains

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[58] Vendler, 'Stevens and Keats' "To Autumn"' in Wallace Stevens: A Celebration 171.
[59] Cook 10.
[60] Keats, The Letters of John Keats 2: 167.

through his calm acceptance of mutability in nature.

The poet condenses autumn from the serene season of the year to a day, hours, minutes and finally a moment and immerses himself in the beauty of the present moment so fully that he can find an aesthetics of nature in each moment like an eternal possession. This intensity lies in the powerful sensibility found in his depiction of the culmination of the natural process. The fertility of the season is described through a repetitive use of the preposition 'with', followed by dense descriptions of the ripening process of various natural objects. In this way we are introduced to the fertility of the season as a real and conceiving, conceptually pregnant presence, thus inducing quite a natural personal imagery.

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

Sound patterning helps to produce the richness and density of autumn which penetrates to the core or 'sweet kernel', represented by the plenitude of [m] sounds in 'mists', 'mellow', 'bosom', 'maturing', 'him', 'moss'd', 'more', 'warm', 'summer', 'o'er-brimm'd' and 'clammy'. The mouth-filling sounds phonetically promise autumn as a time of plenitude, the fruition of the warmth of summer. The season of 'mellow fruitfulness' is breathing with her 'close bosom-friend of the maturing sun' and acts in harmony with him and fecundates the world with the bursting fullness of the fruit and flowers, which are in a sense the offspring of autumn. The poet's masterful use of sounds generates an exquisite and melodious harmony of

autumn.

Grammatical elements further support this effect. The realistic details of the organic movements towards fruition are expressed in the use of the present tense representing the moment to its very full. The past tense is not used in this ode. The uses of the present participle – 'maturing', 'conspiring', 'budding', 'sitting', 'winnowing', 'soft-dying', 'sinking' and 'gathering' – give us the impression of process moving towards its end, and at the same time they suggest the duration of the eternal present in the working of nature. With the form of the present participle, indicating the lapse of time, an autumn day draws towards its end and becomes a lingering glow in the evening sky. The suggestion is that life is ephemeral, and the word 'more' emphasises a desire to accomplish his life intensely: '. . . to set budding more, / And still more, later flowers for the bees, / Until they think warm days will never cease . . .'

In the second stanza, the personified autumn represented in the static figures – 'sitting careless on a granary floor', 'sound asleep' and 'drows'd with the fume of poppies' – gives no hint either of the impatient desire for 'the viewless wings of Poesy' in 'Ode to a Nightingale' or the reluctant admission of the evanescence of life in 'Ode on Melancholy'. These images reflect the poet's released feelings of the moment. The kinetic or bodily movements of the personified autumn held in an immobile tableau vivant manner also make a moment seem an eternal present, suggesting the poet's wish to try to see the details of a motion as if they were in a world of slow-motion film. Phonetically the effect of his sense of duration is represented in 'Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours', with a long vowel in 'oozings', repeated diphthongs in 'hours' and delaying voiced consonants of the [z] sound. In this ode Keats's complete artistic achievement is expressed in a mood of calm acceptance of the natural movements and processes, which change with time throughout the poem. The poem includes the central metaphor of cyclicity in the realm of nature – the law of life. The poet's attitude towards the law of life is to submit himself to the cycle of the seasons with a common-sense acceptance of the inevitable.

The figurative descriptions of transitoriness in the ode enhance the tension of the end of twilight, day and life, accompanied by natural music. The picturesque scenery of the evening of Autumn in the last stanza takes on a peculiar pathetic note polyphonically presented in the various natural sounds. The natural music of the earth – 'a wailful choir the small gnats mourn', 'full-grown lambs loud bleat', 'hedge-crickets sing', 'the red-breast whistles' and 'gathering swallows twitter' – contains hints of an elegy for passing Autumn. The fact that all the images of objects in the ode contain a sense of the shortness of limited life (there is no feeling of eternity but only of the transience of life) reflects the music of 'To Autumn' which is quite different from the rhapsody in the 'Ode to a Nightingale' and the 'Cold Pastoral' in the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. The pathetic image of autumn as a precursor of winter and death reminds the poet of spring and he asks: 'Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they? / Think not of them, thou hast thy music too'. He addresses a farewell to spring as he will do to Autumn when it also is over. It is also an admonition and a self-persuasion to the poet himself to appreciate Autumn's beauty which is particular to itself. The sounds of natural music move towards the poet in three-dimensional space: from the hilly boundary to the garden-croft horizontally and from the sky vertically.[61] Since the word 'barred' in the 'barred clouds' and the 'hilly bourn' may have the meaning of restriction, though there are various possible definitions of it, the poetic space for the ode is restricted from going beyond the physical world. However, the poem gives the spatial expansion of perspective from converging into the word 'gathering' to expanding and fading away to the sky of the swallows's twitterings, with which the coda comes to an end.

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[61] Vendler also indicates in The Odes of John Keats that the poet's use of the space is three dimensional.

> We may look to the horizon where we see barred clouds, and we may reach in thought beyond the stubble-plains (and their incorporated tributary brook) to the river (one natural boundary of the farm), to the hilly bourn of sheep pasturage (another natural boundary), to the hedgerows (planted where river or hill did not separate one farm from another), and finally to a croft (perhaps a far corner of the farm). In the last line, after this careful situating of the perimeter on a plane, the space of the poem becomes three dimensional, and, in a sudden expansion of direction, we lift our eyes up to the skies, the upper "boundary" of the farm. (244-45)

To be content with the limitations of life is an aspect of the poet's philosophical principle as we have seen. Keats's philosophical understanding of nature produces a complete objectivity and detachment in the ode. He finally attains to a state of selflessness. This is proved by the disappearance of the first person, 'I', in the ode. As the fusion of Keats's self and its topological domain reaches its zenith as an act of supreme realisation, the antithetical or opposite elements are reconciled in Keats's 'sole self' ('Ode to a Nightingale', 72) or an 'I'. Mellor writes, 'Significantly, the poet's self-conscious voice is absent from this poem. Addressing autumn, participating in the seasonal processes of life itself, the poet has become the object he addresses'.[62] We could say that it is the presence of 'Negative Capability' in his conception of nature that allows Keats in this poem to come to terms with the natural world. Here the phenomenal world is accepted without any questioning of its value or significance, and there is acknowledgement that all living things live by the provision of nature.

In 'To Autumn' the relation between the natural process and culture or cultivation is realised in an ideal shape, in which reconciliation is effected by appreciating things as they are and passing them into art as suggested by Vendler.

> Just as surely, in sacrificial self-immolation, he gleans with his pen what his fertile brain has conceived; as being passes into art, it loses its "natural" shape and turns from "drooping oats" to grain, from apples to oozing drops, without however losing its truthful origin in life. The beauty of poetry does not resemble mimetically the beauty of life . . . The Gordian knot of representational verisimilitude – which had perplexed Keats from *Psyche* through *Nightingale* to *Urn* – is finally cut. Verisimilitude (or representational "Truth") is dismissed as a criterion for poetic art.[63]

The difficulty of incarnation of poetic truth which has troubled the Romantics is completely resolved in 'To Autumn'. Keats's statement, 'That if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all'[64] is realised.

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[62] Mellor 107.
[63] Vendler, The Odes of John Keats 266.
[64] Keats, The Letters of John Keats 1: 238-39.

There is no necessity to incorporate Greek mythology, classical art, history and allegory in representing beautiful nature. There is no need to embellish the poem with them. The ode is thus on the subject of nature itself, and creates an impression of the harmony of the poet and nature. The serene state of mind is reflected in the ode's dense verbal structure and musicality. The imagery of the harmonisation of humans and nature merges with the impressive unity of its verbal structure, and this Gestalt reveals the authentic presence of the poet's aesthetics.

The reason why Stevens favours the ode so much lies in Keats's complete oneness with the natural world, showing the poet's full communion with nature from where he is and as what he is. The quintessential aesthetic aspect of his poetry, developed through the odes, is here so lucidly integrated in dense and harmonious language that the ode itself should be understood not only as a statement of an aesthetics but of a poetics that had a profound influence on Stevens who says 'The theory of poetry is the theory of life'.[65] Poetry as a medium of reconciliation realised in the ode presents Stevens with an inspiring and suggestive example. Stevens, who feels attracted to Coleridge, Wordsworth and Shelley for their attempts to practise their thoughts on the imagination, is close to Keats in poetic nature. The balanced relationship between the imagination and reality is realised in the most ideal shape in 'To Autumn'. The successful incarnation of the poetic principle has become an example to which 'throughout his long life as a poet, Stevens returned again and again'.[66] Rejecting Romanticism in the pejorative sense, Stevens, in the spirit of 'To Autumn', explores his new Romanticism. In the following chapters I will expand the argument as to how Romanticism is incorporated, albeit critically, into Stevens's poetry.

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[65] Stevens, 'Adagia' in Opus Posthumous 202.
[66] Vendler, 'Stevens and Keats' "To Autumn"' in Wallace Stevens: A Celebration 171.

Chapter 3: Reality-Imagination Complex

Harmonium, Stevens's first book published in 1923, is not arranged throughout in chronological order. 'Domination of Black' (published in 1916) is put after 'Earthy Anecdote' (published in 1918), while 'To the Roaring Wind' (1917) is positioned as the last poem. Furthermore, Stevens deliberately compiled the collection without date of composition for each poem and then persistently preferred the title, 'The Whole of Harmonium' to The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens when his collected edition was to be published in 1954.[1] Stevens's preference for 'The Whole of Harmonium' can be explained in the light of the meaning of 'harmonium'. According to Macmillan's The Grove Concise Dictionary of Music (1988), a 'harmonium' is 'a substitute for the orchestra in domestic music and light music arrangements; it was also popular for Church music and in the cinema' (323). The small keyboard organ used in the home is closely related to everyday life. This domestic instrument in the title implicitly shows the poetic concern with quotidian reality in Stevens's work. At the same time the word 'harmonium' implies 'harmony', suggesting that each poem is intimately connected with the production of harmonious chords. In Stevens's use of 'harmonium' is implied his belief that each poem is organically connected to create a harmonious whole so that 'One poem proves another and the whole' ('A Primitive Like an Orb', *CP*, 441). This process is illuminated by Beckett's discussion of George Santayana's argument about 'harmony' and poetry, which must have remained at the back of Stevens's mind for many years:

> The good man is a poet whose syllables are deeds and make a harmony in

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[1] Stevens wanted to call his collected poems 'The Whole of Harmonium' but was persuaded against it by his publisher. This is explained in his letter to the publisher dated 25 May 1954 as follows:

> I thought of all the objections which you suggest in your letter of May 24 to the title THE WHOLE OF HARMONIUM and brushed them aside. But with all those wise people you speak of thinking that the thing should be called THE COLLECTED POEMS OF WALLACE STEVENS, a machine-made title if there ever was one, it is all right with me.

Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 834.

> Nature. The poet is a rebuilder of the imagination, to make a harmony in that. And he is not a complete poet if his whole imagination is not attuned and his whole experience composed into a single symphony. [2]

However, Harmonium was not a satisfactory collection for Stevens, who, even before it was published, criticised severely the poems as 'horrid cocoons from which later abortive insects have sprung.'[3] In spite of this fact, we can witness in Harmonium Stevens's experimental and remarkable attempts at creating an American poetry.

Stevens's view of Romanticism helps us to articulate his central theme. Stevens tries to rescue the poetic imagination from the Romantic problem of solipsism. The rescue is achieved through a reconciliation between imagination and reality. The problem is how equilibrium between them is to be sustained. In order to reach one realm in which the fruitful union is realised, Stevens must enact the kinds of intricate fluctuations between the imagination and reality which can be witnessed in Harmonium. Stevens says, '. . . I come down from the past, the past is my own and not something marked Coleridge, Wordsworth, etc. I know of no one who has been particularly important to me. My reality-imagination complex is entirely my own even though I see it in others.'[4] It is true that Stevens comes down from the past, being influenced by the Romantics.[5] We cannot assume that Romanticism did not influence the growth of Stevens as a poet because he says that 'the past is my own and not something marked Coleridge, Wordsworth, etc'. When he goes on to say, 'I know of no one who has been particularly important to me. My reality-imagination complex is entirely my own even though I see it in

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[2] William G. Holzberger and Herman J. Saatkamp, eds. Interpretations of Poetry and Religion. The Works of George Santayana vol. III (1900. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons; Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1989) 170. Beckett, quoting from Santayana's argument, supports Stevens's preference for 'harmonium' (75).

[3] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 231.

[4] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 792.

[5] For some information on Stevens's familiarity with the Romantics, see Joan Richardson's Wallace Stevens: The Early Years 1879-1923 (New York: Beech Tree Books 1986). Her autobiographical study of Stevens presents him as an admirer of the Romantics and also mentions that he took at Harvard courses in English literature, among which the Romantic poets were included. (See for example, 68, 110 and 294.)

others', the statement may sound arrogant. But, more positively, Stevens, the heir of Romanticism, wants to demonstrate his complete difference from the Romantics in his idea about the 'reality-imagination complex'. This is mainly because the 'reality-imagination complex' occupies a central place in his poetry. The difficulty of balancing the two which the Romantics experienced is felt by Stevens, too. However, to rescue the Romantic imagination from a pejorative sense of the word 'romantic', Stevens develops his own art and creates his poetry. The dynamism of the relation between the imagination and reality is the 'reality-imagination complex' and acts as a prime mover of poetic creativity. In the process of creative activity Stevens sees the necessity of shaping a new Romanticism through his poetry and creating a terrestrial song sung on and for the American soil. Before turning to a closer examination of Stevens's new Romanticism, we must draw attention to the dynamics of his 'reality-imagination complex'.

To examine his ideas on the interdependence between the imagination and reality, it is necessary to know what reality is for Stevens. When we ask this question, it provokes other questions such as how to grasp reality and how to relate poetry or supreme fiction to reality. We cannot solve the problem of reality by simply defining what it is. We might begin by considering that Stevens views reality as not fixed but mutable. This is mentioned at the end of 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven' (1949).

> It is not in the premise that reality
> Is a solid. It may be a shade that traverses
> A dust, a force that traverses a shade. (*CP*, 489).

Quoting these lines, Richard Allen Blessing says, 'In this case, reality is suggested to be comprised of a movement or energy without form, a movement too rapid to be seen as a solid'.[6] Bornstein, quoting the same lines, also explains Stevens's idea of reality as follows.

These lines build an ascending conditional scale from solid to shade to

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[6] Richard Allen Blessing, Wallace Stevens' "Whole Harmonium" (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1970) 122.

> force, in which each further step reveals itself only by its effect – which would be a ripple or patterned motion – on a grosser element. The curious verb "traverse" probably carries as a secondary sense its legal meaning of formal denial, here denial that reality is a solid or a dust.[7]

For further information about what Stevens means by 'reality', we can have recourse to the idea of reality rephrased in 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words': 'The subject-matter of poetry is not that "collection of solid, static objects extended in space" but the life that is lived in the sense that it composes; and so reality is not that external scene but the life that is lived in it. Reality is things as they are'.[8] Our given circumstances are always becoming and changing. Therefore when the poet's inventions stand in an authentic relation to reality, they will embody the progressive metamorphosis of reality through the process of becoming. His conception of reality does not consist of the static objects but must reflect 'things as they are', including things as they appear to the mind.

In the next chapter I shall try to give a more precise account of Stevens's thought on the function of imagination in relation to external reality. But for now it is worth noting that Stevens's view of reality recalls Wordsworth's view of nature as an 'active universe' (The Prelude, Book II, 266), though, unlike Wordsworth, Stevens denies the divine presence in nature. Reality is life as a force, not static but dynamic.[9] The force of reality confronts the poet as the pressure against which he must press back. The poetic version of reality is incessantly threatening to distort itself because of its inability to keep up with the process of becoming. As for the incessant conflict between the imagination and reality, Stevens says in 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words': 'The mind has added nothing to human nature. It is a violence from within that protects us from a violence without. It is the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality.'[10] Against the

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[7] Bornstein, Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens 184.
[8] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 25.
[9] Bornstein indicates in Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens, 'Things as they are were not objects but forces, not static but dynamic' (183).
[10] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 36.

violence of reality the force of the imagination also assumes a violent form.

This conflict is enacted in the opening poem of Harmonium. The poem tells an 'Earthy Anecdote' of the interdependence between the imagination and reality; it dramatises, that is, its own 'reality-imagination complex'. Later in 'Imagination as Value' Stevens says that 'the great poems of heaven and hell have been written and the great poem of the earth remains to be written'.[11] 'Earthy Anecdote' which was composed in 1918 already shows the poet's readiness to write the 'great poem of the earth'.

Every time the bucks went clattering
Over Oklahoma
A firecat bristled in the way.

Wherever they went,
They went clattering,
Until they swerved
In a swift, circular line
To the right,
Because of the firecat.

Or until they swerved
In a swift, circular line
To the left,
Because of the firecat.

The bucks clattered.
The firecat went leaping,
To the right, to the left,
And

[11] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 142.

Bristled in the way.

Later, the firecat closed his bright eyes
And slept. (*CP*, 3)

The interdependence between the imagination and reality is shown in a dynamic movement created through a game of tag played by the fictitious animal, the firecat and the bucks. The bucks runs this way and that until they make 'a swift, circular line / To the right' and 'to the left'. Thus drawing an arc, they try to escape the fire-cat's chase. The regular movement of swinging left and right recalls the working of a pendulum. The movement also suggests a metronome's beating out of time. As Bornstein says, the poem presents 'a parable of imagination ordering perception'; he goes on:

> The firecat orders the bucks the way the imagination orders perceptions; its ferocity changes their disorganized clatter into an ordered pattern of motion. The firecat thus becomes center to the bucks' moving circle in a dynamic design for which each term needs the other.[12]

As the powerful movements of the wild animals indicate, 'the way the imagination orders perceptions'; indeed, the way the imagination orders reality is violent. The bristling 'firecat' shows violent imaginative force against reality which is almost uncontrollable.

After the firecat orders the bucks to 'swerve in a swift, circular line' to the right and to the left, it 'closed his bright eyes and slept'. To borrow Cook's words, 'some memory of the firecat's leaping is in the -lept of "slept", the closing word, as the memory of the whole poem is enfolded in the moment of closure'.[13] Enjoying the interplay of the imagination and reality to his heart's content, 'the firecat closed his bright eyes / And slept'. This is the realisation of the wish of the imagination.[14] It amounts to a jokey version of Wordsworth's 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'.

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[12] Bornstein, Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens 170-71.
[13] Cook 29.
[14] Stevens puts it thus in 'Adagia', 'The imagination wishes to be indulged.' Stevens, Opus Posthumous 186.

Wordsworth in the 'Preface' to Lyrical Ballads claims that 'Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity'. This is well illustrated in 'I wandered lonely as a Cloud' (1807), in which the poet claims that the emotion is recollected in tranquillity and the spontaneity of its overflow is the reward of the remembering process of storing up and enlivening mental images.

> For oft when on my couch I lie
> In vacant or in pensive mood,
> They flash upon that inward eye
> Which is the bliss of solitude,
> And then my heart with pleasure fills,
> And dances with the Daffodils.

When the pleasant view of daffodils is recollected in tranquillity, the poet achieves perfect contentment in poetic experience. Wordsworth's recollection is of an emotion inspired by nature that provides him with the subject matter for his poetry. Stevens's indulgence in the imagination is inspired by the fiction of the interplay between imagination and reality. The fictive pleasure gained through the conflict of the imagination with reality is an earthly one without any metaphysical dimension. The poem reminds us of Stevens's aphorisms, 'Poetry is the expression of the experience of poetry' and 'To read a poem should be an experience, like experiencing an act'.[15] The aphorisms are realised in the poem since we can participate in the movements of the bucks and the firecat to experience the interactions [emphasis added] of the imagination and reality and know how order is created. As the opening poem, 'Earthy Anecdote' is a good introduction to the terrestrial songs of Harmonium.

The interaction of the imagination and reality is again exemplified in the bare setting of 'Valley Candle' (1917).

> My candle burned alone in an immense valley.
> Beams of the huge night converged upon it,

[15] Stevens, 'Adagia' in Opus Posthumous 190, 191.

Until the wind blew.
Then beams of the huge night
Converged upon its image,
Until the wind blew. (*CP*, 51)

We might expect the candle to cast 'beams', not the 'huge night'. However, Stevens represents the situation vice versa, as if he were emphasising the 'huge night' as dominant reality which usurps the light of imagination. The poet, always conscious of overwhelming reality, treats the relation between the two as a very tense and fragile one, threatened by a gust of wind. This treatment reminds us of Kubla Khan's precarious situation: the pleasure-dome of Kubla Khan in a dream-vision was opposed to the always imminent forces of destructive reality. And it is also recalled that Keats's fancy could not sustain such a transient pleasure in the song of the nightingale beyond a few fleeting moments. Herbert J. Stern interprets the poem, comparing it to 'Earthy Anecdote'. To quote the lines concerned with 'Valley Candle',

> The artificial light of the candle for a moment gives shape to the "beams of the huge night" that converge upon it, . . . The candle gives light, but flickering light, threatened by the wind and dwarfed by the darkness of the immense valley for which it can momentarily provide a center, a focal point, a mode of composition. In the end, however, . . . when the wind blows the candle will go out. Yet, although the initial act of the imagination must eventually succumb to the chaos it opposes, the act, when it takes the form of a poem, enjoys the same permanence that in "Sunday Morning" Stevens attributes to "April's green": the permanence of recurrence.[16]

It is true that the 'permanence of recurrence' is valued by Stevens as an endless cycle of poetic activity. However, Stern's interpretation sounds too optimistic, too sure of the presence of permanence in the poem. In fact, Stevens ends the poem

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[16] Herbert J. Stern, Wallace Stevens: Art of Uncertainty (Ann Arbor: The U of Michigan P, 1966) 127-28.

without rekindling the candle in his imagination. In the poem there is a shift of viewpoint from the candle to its image. After the wind blew the light of the candle, the image revives in the mind until it is engulfed by reality. If Stevens preferred the 'permanence of recurrence', the last lines would be written in the present tense as 'Then beams of the huge night / Converge upon its image, / Until the wind blows'. The past tense of the poem's close indicates that the poetic experience is concluded. We cannot, that is, assume any continuity of poetic activity. Rather, Stevens makes us aware that the light of the imagination is flimsy enough to last only until the wind blows.

In the volume Stevens attempts various dramatisations of the 'reality-imagination complex'. In 'Domination of Black' (1916) and its companion poem, 'The Snow Man' (1921) the activity of the imagination shows a complete contrast. The world of black shows a domination of the formless void of infinite darkness, while the world of snow, to quote Cook, 'is not a domination of white but a poem written against domination, the strategy being as pure a verbal "nothing" as possible'.[17] The former gives us the sense of an ending in the imagination, the latter the sense of a tabula rasa on which a new poetic creativity is going to begin.

In 'Domination of Black' 'the colors of the bushes / And of the fallen leaves', lit up by the light of the fire against the darkness, turn into an art gallery of colourful images.

> At night, by the fire,
> The colors of the bushes
> And of the fallen leaves,
> Repeating themselves,
> Turned in the room,
> Like the leaves themselves
> Turning in the wind.
> Yes: but the color of the heavy hemlocks
> Came striding.

[17] Cook 47.

And I remembered the cry of the peacocks.

The colors of their tails
Were like the leaves themselves
Turning in the wind,
In the twilight wind.
They swept over the room,
Just as they flew from the boughs of the hemlocks
Down to the ground.
I heard them cry – the peacocks.
Was it a cry against the twilight
Or against the leaves themselves
Turning in the wind,
Turning as the flames
Turned in the fire,
Turning as the tails of the peacocks
Turned in the loud fire,
Loud as the hemlocks
Full of the cry of the peacocks?
Or was it a cry against the hemlocks? (*CP*, 8-9)

We enjoy not only the dancing images which involve the piling up of one image upon another – 'repeating themselves' – but also the rhythm of 'turning' movement in dancing colours.[18] When Stevens sees colours, he hears music. A dizzying medley of imagery is created through tones and colours and shapes that blend in our own mind. But we are called back to reality by the poet's sudden utterance,

[18] As Stevens comments on the poem in his letter as follows, he makes much of the imageries of colours and sounds.

> I am sorry that a poem of this sort has to contain any ideas at all, because its sole purpose is to fill the mind with the images & sounds that it contains. A mind that examines such a poem for its prose contents gets absolutely nothing from it. You are supposed to get heavens full of the colors and full of sounds, and you are supposed to feel as you would feel if you actually got all this. Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 251.

'Yes: but the color of the heavy hemlocks / Came striding'. There is an acknowledgement here of an overwhelming reality beyond the boisterous dance of the fallen leaves.

We can identify the dancing colours of fallen leaves, bushes and flames of the fire as an image of mutability. This is emphasised by the repeated use of words such as 'turning' and 'turned'. The mutable products of the imagination make a contrast with the immutable existence of evergreen hemlocks. Therefore the ominous presence of 'the heavy hemlocks' which 'came striding' into the pleasurable reverie of the imagination can be interpreted as the forceful presence of reality. In the process of the domination of reality the colourful interplay of images is reduced to a single colour of green of hemlocks and then the loss of colour in blackness. The dancing rhythm represented in the 'turning' movement also loses its musicality and is reduced to a 'loud' harsh noise, a 'cry'.

> Out of the window,
> I saw how the planets gathered
> Like the leaves themselves
> Turning in the wind.
> I saw how the night came,
> Came striding like the color of the heavy hemlocks
> I felt afraid.
> And I remembered the cry of the peacocks. (*CP*, 9)

Considering the penultimate line 'I felt afraid', we may note that Stevens heard 'the cry of the peacocks' as the terrified cry against 'the night' or the 'domination of black' which absorbs every colourful imagery into its blackness. The wordplay of 'lack' in 'black' implies the lack of the light of the imagination. As Bornstein indicates, 'the imagination fails to resist fully the pressure of reality, and the poem ends with the domination of black'.[19] The poem narrated in the past tense tells us the fact that the poet's experience of an oppressive power of reality was comparable to the great nothingness of the blackness which absorbs the light of

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[19] Bornstein, Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens 197.

the imagination.

In a letter Stevens explains 'The Snow Man' as 'an example of the necessity of identifying oneself with reality in order to understand it and enjoy it'.[20] To this end, the poem opens with the impersonal pronoun, 'one', part of Stevens's poetic strategy to erase the ego.

> One must have a mind of winter
> To regard the frost and the boughs
> Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;
>
> And have been cold a long time
> To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
> The spruces rough in the distant glitter
>
> Of the January sun; and not to think
> Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
> In the sound of a few leaves,
>
> Which is the sound of the land
> Full of the same wind
> That is blowing in the same bare place
>
> For the listener, who listens in the snow,
> And, nothing himself, beholds
> Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is. (*CP*, 9-10)

Here reality is represented as the harshness of the winter world. The identification with this reality is represented through the dense descriptions of the wintry scenery. Richard A. Macksey helpfully elucidates the work done by Stevens's syntax: 'Syntactically, the range of the meditation is entirely confined within the limits of a single sentence, the shortest intelligible unit in discourse.

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[20] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 464.

And yet the impersonal "One" of the first line is dissolved into the "nothing" which concludes the poem.'[21] One elaborate sentence, in which a series of poetic experiences in the identification with reality are condensed, embodies a process of incessant communion with nature. The interplay with the sounds of winter also contributes to the experience of the 'mind of winter'. The hard and icy image of the winter is achieved through sibilants as well as clattering sounds such as 'frost', 'crusted', 'shagged' and 'glitter'. The syntactic convolution and the phonetic denseness enhance the dense experience of an approach to oneness with nature.

Daniel R. Schwarz discerns a Keatsian dimension to the poem; he asks: 'Is not "The Snow Man" a eulogy for Keatsian negative capability where the poet empties himself of his own ego as a prelude to responding with the full power of his imagination . . . ?'[22] The poem can certainly be linked with Keats's 'In Drear Nighted December' (1817) where 'Negative Capability' is practised:

> In drear nighted December,
> Too happy, happy tree,
> Thy branches ne'er remember
> Their green felicity:
> The north cannot undo them
> With a sleety whistle through them,
> Nor frozen thawings glue them
> From budding at the prime. (1-8)

Through 'Negative Capability' Keats describes the mind of winter by which he believes he can come to terms with negative aspects of life without lamenting past joy. Keats regards the mind of winter as an antidote for the pains of his humanity since it has 'The feel of not to feel it' (21). Though Vendler does not mention the term, 'Negative Capability' when she discusses the relation between 'The Snow

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[21] Richard A. Macksey, 'The Climates of Wallace Stevens' in The Act of the Mind: Essays on the Poetry of Wallace Stevens, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce and J. Hillis Miller (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1965) 196.

[22] Daniel R. Schwarz, Narrative and Representation in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1933) 64.

Man' and 'In Drear Nighted December', she indicates, implying the poet's identification with the cold winter, the link between the two poems: 'we understand *The Snow Man* better, I think, when we see it as Stevens' answer to Keats's challenge voiced in the small impersonal poem, *In Drear-Nighted December*'.[23] According to her,

> Writhing, or not writhing, over passed joy is what *The Snow Man* is about. Stevens here attempts the amnesia of nature, an impossible task. Borrowing Keats's phrase "not to feel", Stevens changes it into "not to think"; and he decides to accept Keats's challenge and try to say "in rhyme" "the feel of not to feel it". The attempt to numb, while not annihilating, the senses – to continue to see and hear without admitting misery and loss – creates the structure of Stevens' poem.[24]

To put it another way, Stevens tries to say 'in rhyme' the mind of winter experienced through 'Negative Capability'.

Stern comments, 'In it [the poem], the poet achieves the Coleridgean "One Life" at the cost of becoming as inhuman as the landscape he observes.[25] This comment helps one understand Stevens's difference from as well as affinity with Romanticism. Stevens not only contemplates reality, but also performs the poetic act secretly, almost as though seeking to deny the presence of a subjective consciousness. Through imagining a 'mind of winter', a blank mind, the poet seeks to behold reality without any innate ideas. A mind like a tabula rasa seems necessary for a new poetic creativity.[26] Quoting the last lines, Kermode says:

> Out of "The Snow Man" (*C.P.*, p.9) grows the recurring metaphor of winter as a pure abstracted reality, a bare icy outline purged clean of all the

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[23] Helen Vendler, Wallace Stevens: Words Chosen Out of Desire, (Cambridge, Mass, and London: Harvard UP, 1984) 46.

[24] Vendler, Wallace Stevens: Words Chosen Out of Desire 47.

[25] Stern 188n52.

[26] The promise of a new poetic creativity is also supported by Vendler's subtle comparison of the description of the winter nature in 'The Snow Man' with Keats's 'In Drear Nighted December'. She says Stevens "'corrects" Keats once more by placing his trees not in a drear night in the closing month of the year but in the glitter of the sun in the month beginning the new year', Vendler, Wallace Stevens: Words Chosen Out of Desire 48. For a new poetic creativity the setting of the poem is put 'in the month beginning the new year'.

> accretions brought by the human mind to make it possible for us to conceive of reality and live our lives. So purged, reality has no human meaning, nor has a man; he is '. . . the listener who listens in the snow, / And, nothing himself, beholds / Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is'.[27]

Through the identification with reality the imaginative faculty in its operation discovers an outline inherent in reality rather than imposing an outline on it. What the imagination 'beholds' is the bare reality stripped of any innate ideas: 'Nothing that is not there'. And 'the listener who listens in the snow . . . beholds . . . the nothing that is', showing a complete identification with the nothingness and emptiness of reality. The poem's subject, the impersonal 'one', corresponds with 'nothing himself' though, in Vendler's words, Stevens's attempt to mime 'the amnesia of nature' is 'an impossible task'. It is from this desired state of nothingness that Stevens tries to create poetry.

Kermode also observes that 'the seasons – not only as a natural analogue to the phases of human life but also as figuring the cyclical nature of the creative imagination – become dominant motives in the later work, and they are present, inexplicitly, in *Harmonium*'.[28] According to Macksey, Stevens is conscious of the mutable nature of reality: 'In poetry he achieves endless temporary alliances with his world, lives in the instant finality of experience'[29]. For the imagination to adapt to changing environments, its cyclical activity is essential. 'The Snow Man', to quote Macksey again, 'occupies a privileged place in the Stevens canon. It serves as a point of departure for the luxuriant cycle of the seasons in *Harmonium*'.[30] In order to generate a new poetic creativity from the winter phase of the imagination,

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[27] Kermode 34.

[28] Kermode 34.

[29] Macksey 185. Macksey indicates the adaptation of the poet's imagination to changing environments.

> For Stevens, man lives in the weather as he lives in the changing light of his moods and new redactions of reality; and, like the weather, he can be described only from day to day. For him, as for Baudelaire, the climates of his landscapes are also the climates of his consciousness. (187)

[30] Macksey 195.

a change which is cyclic and self-renewing is necessary for Stevens's poetry. Miller helpfully argues for a comparison between the cyclical change of the imagination and the changes of the season, relating these changes to the act of 'decreation'.

> No sooner has the mind created a new fictive world than this "recent imagining reality" (*CP*, 465) becomes obsolete in its turn, and must be rejected. This rejection is the act of decreation, and returns man once more to unadorned reality. The cycle then begins again: imagining followed by decreation followed by imagining and so on for as long as life lasts. . . . This cycle seems to move with a slow and stately turning, like the sequence of the seasons which is so often its image. . . . Stevens' *Collected Poems* moves in a stately round through the whole cycle of the seasons, from the gaudy, spring-like poems of *Harmonium*, like new buds on the rock, through *Transport to Summer* and *The Auroras of Autumn*, and then back again to winter's bareness with *The Rock*.[31]

The activity of the imagination must change according to our given circumstances which are always changing. By creating new structures to come up with changing reality, the 'recent imagining reality' does not become obsolete.

The domination of reality over the imagination is the subject of 'Domination of Black'. 'The Snow Man', written against this domination, represents the complex relation between reality and the imagination. From decreating an imaginative product to creating a new product, Stevens's poetic activity is incessantly repeated. The always changing nature of imaginative acts is in accord with living and mutable reality. The cycle of the seasons is figured as the process of the beginning and the ending of the poetic activity. And in the process of creating poetry, we can find a Romantic conflict between the nature of reality and imagination. 'Peter Quince at the Clavier' (1915) and 'To the One of Fictive Music' (1922) try to balance most delicately on the cusp of the marriage of the imagination and reality. And the difficulty of this balance is evident.

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[31] J. Hillis Miller, 'Wallace Stevens' Poetry of Being' in The Act of the Mind: Essays on the Poetry of Wallace Stevens, 150-51. Fuller discussion about decreation will be presented in the last chapter.

In 'Peter Quince at the Clavier' the story of Susanna and the elders is rewritten into a parable of the tense relation between the poet and his muse: by the elder's amorous exploitation of the imagination they violate her and miss her beauty. The story is narrated, as Riddel puts it, in the 'sonatina framework' in music.[32]

> Just as my fingers on these keys
> Make music, so the selfsame sounds
> On my spirit make a music too.
>
> Music is feeling, then, not sound;
> And thus it is that what I feel,
> Here in this room, desiring you,
>
> Thinking of your blue-shadowed silk,
> Is music. (*CP*, 89-90)

The poem opens with the equation of music and feeling, showing Stevens's conscious use of music which, he finds, is intimately related to poetry. He regards the music as 'a communication of emotion'. And he goes on to say, 'It would not have been different if it had been the music of poetry or the voice of the protagonist telling the tale or speaking out his sense of the world'.[33] Beckett speaks of Stevens's 'use of music as a metaphor for the kind of significance which poetry also can create'. To support this view, she quotes Santayana's remarks from Interpretations of Poetry and Religion, which we noted at the beginning of this chapter. To put it briefly here again, Stevens, who was influenced by Santayana's idea of a poet 'as a rebuilder of the imagination, to make a harmony in that', wished to call his collected poems 'The Whole of Harmonium' so as to indicate that they form a harmonious whole. Just as the fingers of the pianist on the clavier produce what he feels through the sound of music, so the poet creates a music of poetry by which he can shape in form his feelings towards his muse. The problem

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[32] Riddel 73.
[33] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 126.

is that the poet who recognises the 'reality-imagination complex' cannot simply compose harmonious music. The story of Susanna and the elders creates a scenario for the 'reality-imagination complex' and the framework of music gives sound effects for the story. Though Stevens at the harmonium humbly expresses his loving feelings towards his muse in American music, the poem's 'title, the yokel at the delicate instrument suggests the inadequacy of the elders before Susanna, of the poet before his own poetic concept'.[34] His awkward performance reflects the disruptive part of the music.

According to the sonata form, exposition-development-recapitulation, the expository part begins with emotional invocation to his muse and the sensual experience in imagining her culminates until it is dismissed at the developmental part. Susanna's serene surrender to the ordered world of the imagination is suddenly disturbed by the elders' violation, and the poem mimics this falling into a chaotic state. This dramatic movement in the developmental part is enhanced by the sound effects of disruptive elements in the clashing sounds of 'cymbal', 'horns' and 'tambourines'. Communion with the muse is broken easily. Then we move on to recapitulation.

> Beauty is momentary in the mind –
> The fitful tracing of a portal;
> But in the flesh it is immortal.
> The body dies; the body's beauty lives.
> . . . . . .
> Susanna's music touched the bawdy strings
> Of those white elders; but, escaping,
> Left only Death's ironic scraping.
> Now, in its immortality, it plays
> On the clear viol of her memory,
> And makes a constant sacrament of praise. (*CP*, 91-92)

In the preceding chapters we observed the Romantic failure to recollect vestiges of

[34] Beckett 74-75.

the disappearing dream. For example, Keats in 'Ode to a Nightingale' rhapsodised the transient but exquisite pleasure offered by the imagination, and returned to reality with the word 'forlorn' sounding like the sound of a tolling bell: 'Forlorn! the very word is like a bell / To toll me back from thee to my sole self!' (71-72). Stevens represents his return by the scraping sound of a stringed instrument. For the poets who value the imagination the return to reality involves a death of imagination. Keats ends the ode wondering whether the felt and proclaimed reality is mere illusion: 'Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music: - Do I wake or sleep?' (79-80), while Stevens, being conscious of this proclaimed reality, begins to 'make music' with the living memory of her beauty. The part of recapitulation does not mean the end of the imagination but the beginning of the new poetic creativity: 'it plays / On the clear viol of her memory'. Thus we return to a reassuring restatement of the opening theme according to the sonata form.

Riddel indicates that the poem's theme lies in the paradox that to become immortal momentary beauty in the mind must take on a physical form.[35] He describes the poem as 'a poem about poetry, and particularly about form as it comes to be an imperative in a world of flux'.[36] Riddel valuably reminds us that Stevens is giving new life to an old poetic theme; the idea of immortality through art is not peculiar to Stevens since it also becomes one of the dominant themes in Shakespeare's sonnets[37]. Though 'The body dies; the body's beauty lives' since in the flesh of poetry beauty is immortal. For momentary beauty to be held permanently, it must be concretised in poetry. By comparing the process of creating poetry to a sacramental act in a religious ceremony, Stevens also suggests the sacred nature of poetry. The apotheosis of the power of the imagination shows

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[35] Riddel 75-76.

[36] Riddel 73.

[37] Take Sonnet 18 for example, in which immortality through art is ensured.

> But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
> Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st
> Nor shall Death brag thou wand'rest, in his shade,
> When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st,
> So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
> So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

the belief of the Romantics that they could produce the connection between poetry and something that satisfies the need for belief. But the difference between Stevens and the Romantics, and what makes Stevens modern, lies in the fact that his poetic activity is energetic enough to confront the destructive force of reality. Stevens proceeds less through indulgence in the imaginative world, but by being conscious of pressing reality. Unlike Wordsworth, who claims, 'Poetry . . . takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity', as we observed in 'Earthy Anecdote', Stevens's dream of poetry is created out of a violent space, a battlefield of pressing reality and pressing back imagination. Pressing back against the pressure of reality, Stevens must practise the constant sacrament of art to recollect the fresh image of Susanna. Stevens's incessant conflict in the act of poetic creativity shows a modern attitude to Romanticism.

Musical metaphors are again used in 'To the One of Fictive Music' and the subtle relation between the imagination and reality is again considered. The poem reminds us of Shelley's invocation of the muse in Alastor and its counterpart, Epipsychidion. In the previous chapter, it was argued that Shelley and Stevens view poetry as something capable of connecting between language and perceived reality. In Alastor and Epipsychidion Shelley, by forming the muse into the perfect woman, tried to achieve an ideal union with her in poetry; however, as we witnessed, the search for her in Alastor ended in failure with the poet-lover's death, giving us the sense of the limited power of poetic imagination to seize the poetic logos. Though the Shelleyan quest for the muse whom he could not find was attempted again in Epipsychidion, the problem of artistic representation is not solved. The poem suggests to us the difficulty of the incarnation of poetic truth. These two poems are linked with Stevens's 'Bouquet of Belle Scavoir' which shows that the Romantic epistemological problem is taken over by Stevens. Isabel G. Maccaffrey states that 'Stevens himself was aware of a peculiar relationship in his most characteristic poetry between medium and message, language and referent'.[38] Her argument helps to account for Stevens's Romantic quest for poetic

[38] Isabel G. MacCaffrey, 'The Ways of Truth in "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle"' in Wallace

truth and the difficulty of making present the truth which language represents in 'To the One of Fictive Music'.

The poem is written in the form of an ode to praise and glorify the superb presence of his muse. This is also supported by the addressing title as 'To the One of Fictive Music'. The praising tone that permeates the whole poem is conveyed by the repeated uses of the superlative and the comparative. This style enables us to envision 'Susanna' as the highest form of beauty. The description of her as a superb presence also enhances the praising tone as well as the poet's affirmative view of the imagination. Thus Stevens declares the sovereign power of imagination over reality. The poem shows Stevens's post-Romantic self-consciousness about the imaginative world. The poet's addressee is bound up with the 'fictive', which he approves as a substitute for reality, an independent and self-sufficient means of asserting or discovering values.[39] So far from thinking that the imagination deals with the non-existent, Stevens regards the creations of the imagination as related to living experience and reflecting reality. We may recall that Regueiro identifies as a modern characteristic of Stevens his thought on fiction, the living experience of which becomes closer to what is real.[40] In evoking 'the one of fictive music' so boldly and clearly, Stevens goes beyond the Romantics, who rarely admit so openly that what they invent is unreal.

Unlike Shelley, Stevens creates what he desires as the ideal out of this world. Addressing her as 'sister', 'mother' and 'queen' shows that Stevens's muse is an earthly mother rather than a dream figure. This is supported by Riddel, who says, 'the muse, though an ideal of beauty, would seem to be mirrored in the world's body, the mother from which man is removed, the ideal of whole being he worships'.[41] The representation of his muse as an earthly figure shows the poet's wish to integrate reality with his imaginative creation. Though the birth of the muse

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Stevens: A Celebration, ed. Frank Dogget and Robert Buttel (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 197.

[39] We will come back to Stevens's idea of the fiction as a substitute for reality in the next chapter.

[40] See Chapter 1, 45-46.

[41] Riddel 68.

makes us conscious of the imaginative world, the image of his muse in its alienation from reality makes us realise our conclusive separation both from the muse and reality when the earth becomes transformed into something different from what is desired.

> Now, of the music summoned by the birth
> That separates us from the wind and sea,
> Yet leaves us in them, until earth becomes,
> By being so much of the things we are,
> Gross effigy and simulacrum, none
> Gives motion to perfection more serene
> Than yours, out of our imperfections wrought,
> Most rare, or ever of more kindred air
> In the laborious weaving that you wear. (*CP*, 87)

Imaginative products 'out of our imperfections wrought' lose contact with reality; they dwindle into a kind of shadow of the real. Besides, the products of the imagination which fail to become part of reality also separate from the imagined to become 'gross effigy and simulacrum'. Furthermore, this separation might also seem to be against Stevens's principle quoted in the previous chapter, 'The pejorative sense applies where the poet is not attached to reality, where the imagination does not adhere to reality, which, for my part, I regard as fundamental'.[42] Stevens ascribes the failures in Romanticism to the divorce of imagination from reality. When the imagination loses contact with reality, the poetic invention is reduced to a mere dream without the sense of reality. The poet's invocation of the muse must be realised through adherence to reality. And the muse or the poetic imagination must also adhere to reality so that the music of the earthly muse sounds 'kindred' to us who are part of reality.

The poet tries to compensate with appropriate figurations for the inability of the image to render the object:

> For so retentive of themselves are men

[42] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 31.

That music is intensest which proclaims
The near, the clear, and vaunts the clearest bloom,
And of all vigils musing the obscure,
That apprehends the most which sees and names,
As in your name, an image that is sure,
Among the arrant spices of the sun,
O bough and bush and scented vine, in whom
We give ourselves our likest issuance. (*CP*, 88)

To obliterate the distinction between reality and the imagined depends on the degree to which the poet can fill the gap between what is imagined and the offspring of the imagination: 'we give ourselves our likest issuance'. The poet wants to make real what is imagined; however, the superlative degree of 'our likest issuance' implies that the conceiving imagination only comes close to what is imagined and that the outcome of the imagination by which he can give the likest image of the muse, cannot avoid the inevitable corruption of the ideal in the process of incarnation.

Yet not too like, yet not so like to be
Too near, too clear, saving a little to endow
Our feigning with the strange unlike, whence springs
The difference that heavenly pity brings. (*CP*, 88)

The difficulty of describing the imagined is also illustrated in his attempt to bridge the disparity between the thing and his description of the thing by a series of analogies introduced by 'like'. Exploring the figurative possibilities of poetry, the poet cannot hold what he desires as the 'image that is sure'. Stevens enhances the very difference between 'an image that is sure' and 'the strange unlike' which the imagination brings and tries to compensate for the difference with 'our feigning' or 'invention' in an archaic sense. What the poet represents in fiction cannot verge on what he has in his mind, showing the artist's concern for verisimilitude.

This reminds us of the Shelleyan quest-romance, its pursuit of the unattainable. In the previous chapter I pointed out that Stevens quotes approvingly from

Shelley's A Defence of Poetry in 'The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet' in The Necessary Angel.[43] To Shelley's remark on poetry as 'the centre and circumference of knowledge', Stevens adds an explanation, 'to which, in the absence of a definition, all the variations of definition are peripheral'. And by contrast with Shelley who dramatises the collapse of language, Stevens who senses the difficulty in the limits of the imagination, avoids imposing meanings on the creations of the imagination and tries to arrest it in a verbal form through peripheral and approximate representations by which a context to determine their referents is being built up. As Shelley illustrated the difficulty of poetic representation in 'To a Skylark',[44] what the poet seizes as the ultimate through the imagination cannot be simply put into words since it is beyond words, beyond images.

The solution to this epistemological problem lies in the way that Stevens grasps reality. The imaginative product which comes out of not fixed but changeable reality must be in a state of continual change as well. In order to grasp the mutable and dynamic nature of reality, Stevens suggests: 'A moment ago the resemblance between things was spoken of as one of the significant components of the structure of reality. It is significant because it creates the relation just described. It binds together. It is the base of appearance.'[45] Through this 'resemblance' which creates the relation between things it is possible to depict what is real since we cannot identify the thing in itself in a state of flux. Stevens goes on to say, 'Its [Nature's] prodigy is not identity but resemblance and its universe of reproduction is not an assembly line but an incessant creation. Because this is so in nature, it is so in metaphor.'[46] Stevens regards 'the creation of resemblance by the imagination' as 'metaphor' and suggests that 'metamorphosis might be a better word'[47]. According to the constant flux and movement in nature, the product of the imagination is subject to 'an incessant creation' like a living

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[43] See Chapter 2, 47-49.
[44] See Chapter 2, 58n19.
[45] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 72.
[46] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 73.
[47] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 72.

thing. Therefore the activity of the imagination can be appropriately said to be 'metamorphosis'. This reminds us of his definition of the new Romantic: 'poetry is essentially romantic, only the romantic of poetry must be something constantly new'. For him it is important that poetry involves a fresh creativity in order to break the deadlock of Romanticism and to overcome the limitation that Symbolism confronted. He believes that 'without this new romantic, one gets nowhere'.[48] To represent the mutable nature of reality it is important to have incessant creation of resemblance by the imagination in order not to have the stale representation of verbal art. It is because he is afraid of attaching a fixed image to what poetry signifies. Stevens does not represent the muse with such a clear image as 'Susanna'. Rather the peripheral description of her through the repeated uses of the superlative and the comparative brings about Gestalt perceptions to vision her as the highest form of beauty. Like abstract art an image emerging from all different aspects intuited together is what Stevens aims for in poetry. Therefore the 'likest issuance' of his muse resembles what the poet imagines and shows a successful invocation of her.

Embracing the limit of imagination, the poem ends with a definite view of the imagination: 'Unreal, give back to us what once you gave: / The imagination that we spurned and crave'. The strong tone found in this definite attitude makes the poet's claim for the imagination more credible and acceptable. He 'spurned' 'the strange unlike' and also 'craves' it. This seems to be a contradictory attitude; however, in this claim we can find Stevens's subtle ideas about the 'reality-imagination complex' and his open acknowledgement that the imagination thrives on the 'unreal'. The poet seeks to unite two fields in a new and strikingly fertile relationship. Despite the poet's desire to make present the muse through the act of invocation, he wishes also that she should appear as something different. The imagination affected by the pressure of reality is doomed to give rise to creations different from those the poet desires; at the same time, it transforms the real into 'gross effigy and simulacrum'. Through the acknowledgement of the

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[48] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 277. Also see, Chapter 1, 7-8.

inevitable fate of the imagination, Stevens accepts fiction and desires that the imagination should create it. The poem shows a balanced view about the imagination and reality. There seems to be agreement among critics about the interpretation of the poem as an attempt to reassert the claims of fiction in an unfavourable time for poetic activity.[49] However, it is also possible to read the poem in the context of Romantic conflicts between the imagination and reality.

The problem of the 'reality-imagination complex' becomes the subject of 'The Comedian as the Letter C' (1922). His hero, Crispin, seeking for an ideal realm of poetry to construct, adventures on unknown seas; however, overwhelmed by enormous reality, he recognises the limit of imagination and falls into the quotidian reality. This is comically mocked through euphuistic diction. The first section entitled 'The World without Imagination' opens with the aphoristic 'Nota: man is the intelligence of his soil, / The sovereign ghost'. This opening proposition is commented upon by Kermode as meaning, 'man being the only creature of intelligence, spiritually endowed, is mind and soul of his world; he provides its *rationale* and its rules'.[50] The solipsistic man is identified as 'the sovereign ghost', which ironically implies the absoluteness of the imagination. Therefore it is impossible for this self-satisfied creature, this clownishly endowed intellect to be in the same position with respect to the sea.[51] 'The sea, as often in Stevens, is finally intractable reality, that which the imagination cannot subdue to its devices'.[52] Before the sea as enormous and chaotic reality, what the imagination cannot control, Crispin helplessly is 'washed away by magnitude' (*CP*, 28) and loses the power of imagination to give it a harmonious order: 'Polyphony beyond his baton's thrust' (*CP*, 28).

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[49] Frank Kermode describes of the poem as 'the imaginative effort of the mind, especially in a time like the present when reality presses more imperiously, and the struggle to accommodate it to human needs is harder than ever before'. And citing the last couplet, he says it states 'the human need of the saving fiction' (38). Riddel also with a view of crisis in imagination in modern times says, 'It is a poem Stevens needed very much, to reaffirm the importance of poetry in a time when the muse had become anachronistic, not to say unreal' (69).

[50] Kermode 45-46.

[51] Kermode 46.

[52] Beckett 85.

Here was the veritable ding an sich, at last,
Crispin confronting it, a vocable thing,
But with a speech belched out of hoary darks
Noway resembling his, a visible thing,
And excepting negligible Triton, free
From the unavoidable shadow of himself
That lay elsewhere around him. Severance
Was clear. The last distortion of romance
Forsook the insatiable egotist. The sea
Severs not only lands but also selves.
Here was no help before reality.
Crispin beheld and Crispin was made new.
The imagination, here, could not evade,
In poems of plums, the strict austerity
Of one vast, subjugating, final tone.
The drenching of stale lives no more fell down. (*CP*, 29-30)

The hero's voyage is to construct an ideal realm of poetry, that is, a new Romanticism. In a letter of 12 January 1940 which was written after the poem, Stevens's ideas about a 'new romanticism' can be witnessed:

> I suppose that the way of all mind is from romanticism to realism, to fatalism and then to indifferentism, unless the cycle re-commences and the thing goes from indifferentism back to romanticism all over again. . . . what the world looks forward to is a new romanticism, a new belief. . . . About the time when I, personally, began to feel round for a new romanticism, I might naturally have been expected to start on a new cycle. Instead of doing so, I began to feel that I was on the edge: that I wanted to get to the center: that I was isolated, and that I wanted to share the common life.[53]

According to Bornstein, 'Stevens did not want merely to inaugurate a new

[53] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 350-52.

personal cycle by returning to the watered down old romanticism of his youth. The world needed "a new romanticism, a new belief', and so did he'. Through 'the choice between periphery and center as the major decision of his later career', Stevens leans towards the 'new but central romanticism'.[54] In order to create 'the new but central romanticism', Stevens needed to get to the centre of 'a new cycle' which lies in the 'common life'. The central man whom the poet desires to be close to must be out of this quotidian reality. In order to embark on 'a new cycle' for 'a new romanticism', it is also necessary for Crispin to face his baptism of the sea as enormous reality and to be 'washed away by magnitude'. Stevens's hero must endure some form of initiation in order to cleanse himself of Romantic tradition and to be 'made new' or become an ignorant man again, who sees reality with an ignorant eye or with fresh and pure perception. Stevens's suggestion that 'we must somehow cleanse the imagination of the romantic'[55] is dramatised here. After he is reborn into a new self who can create 'a new romanticism', 'the drenching of stale lives no more fell down.'

However, the modern poet who tries to get out of the Romantic predicament feels the difficulty of creating a new Romanticism. In 'The Paltry Nude Starts on a Spring Voyage' (1919) the paltry nude is represented as the symbolic figure for the mind desiring a new fictive covering. Figuring the quest for a new poetic creativity she starts on a spring voyage, which is not as successful as it looks:

> She too is discontent
> And would have purple stuff upon her arms,
> Tired of the salty harbors,
> Eager for the brine and bellowing
> Of the high interiors of the sea.

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[54] Bornstein identifies 'about the time' as 'after Harmonium' in Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens (175); however, it can be said to be that Stevens's search for a new Romanticism begins with Harmonium. This is represented in 'The Comedian as the Letter C'.

[55] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 138.

The wind speeds her,
Blowing upon her hands
And watery back.
She touches the clouds, where she goes
In the circle of her traverse of the sea.

Yet this is meagre play
In the scrurry and water-shine,
As her heels foam –
Not as when the goldener nude
Of a later day

Will go, like the centre of sea-green pomp,
In an intenser calm,
Scullion of fate,
Across the spick torrent, ceaselessly,
Upon her irretrievable way. (*CP*, 5-6)

Though spring is the time of year associated with the beginning of the new cycle of the creative imagination, she sails round in circles and gets nowhere as suggested by 'she goes / In the circle of her traverse of the sea'. Besides the power of the spring imagination cannot satisfy itself because of its insatiable desire for a new poetic creativity. The spring voyage, which is 'discontent' with the unsatisfied imagination, merely becomes a 'meagre play' in contrast with the 'goldener nude / Of a later day', the personification of the summer imagination whose product is pompous.

Bloom interprets the poem as an 'anti-Romantic poem' that shows the 'American Romantic stance of Stevens'.[56] However, the 'American Romantic stance of Stevens' involves a severe task: the poet who is conscious of self-renewal cannot retrieve what he was for a continuing process of transformations in the

[56] Bloom, Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate 25.

imagination. Doggett says that 'the way of the flux is an irretrievable way, and time and process go on a course, although without a known direction'.[57] According to the changing reality, the poetic imagination must be reborn 'ceaselessly'. This energetic survival of the poetic imagination becomes essential for a new Romanticism. Cook points to the presence of cleaning or cleansing words in the poem.[58] It might be necessary for the poet to repeat the cleaning image to avoid the stale. As 'scullion of fate' suggests, it is necessary to cleanse the imagination 'ceaselessly' for an ever-changing creation, thus making the task of the 'scullion' much busier and harder. The dream of a new Romanticism cannot be fulfilled easily. The image of kitchen labour represents the poet's struggle for a new poetic creativity and also degrades the poet's desired Romanticism. By degrading the setting for the American Venus deliberately, Stevens shows his commitment to the common life in which he must realise a new Romanticism. The difficulty of creating a new Romanticism is demonstrated in 'The Paltry Nude Starts on a Spring Voyage', despite the recognition of the need of the 'new but central romanticism'.

In 'The Comedian as the Letter C' the process of modifying Romantic convention passes into the image of breaking with it to create a new Romanticism. Against the sea as 'the veritable ding an sich', the mythical and imaginative character, Triton, becomes a negligible and unsubstantial existence without 'the unavoidable shadow of himself / That lay elsewhere around him'. The severance of the relation between the imagination and reality emerges as unavoidable: the sea confronting him as 'the veritable ding an sich . . . / Severs not only lands but also

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[57] Doggett 66.

[58] According to Cook,

> Cleansing, at any rate, is essential. . . . Semantically, many are words for cleaning; phonetically, they are sk- or scr- words. . . . For the sea itself is cleansing, and it can be troped as cleansing its own figures, tropes and Venuses both. Stevens avoids (or submerges) the most obvious sc-, cleansing, marine word, which is "scour". Ships routinely "scour" the sea, and insofar as this nude is a figurehead (which is not very far) she does too. (36)

Bloom suggests the meaning of 'spick' as "'Spick", as Stevens, the Pennsylvania Dutchman, would have known, means "spotless, neat, clean, fresh, new", from the Dutch for "spike-splinter-new"'. Harold Bloom, Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate (1977; Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1980) 26.

selves. / Here was no help before reality'. As a result the products of the imagination suffer from the inevitable 'distortion' of reality. According to Bornstein,

> Stevens identifies romanticism as the exaggerative egotism he had escaped after his youth: "the last distortion of romance / Forsook the insatiable egotist". (*CP* 30) Crispin must learn not that "man is the intelligence of his soil" (*CP* 27) but that "his soil is man's intelligence" (*CP* 36), not to dominate but to express his native grounds.[59]

Simply to assume the union of the two brings back the problem of Romanticism as a mere illusion. It is when Crispin acknowledges the severance that he is able no longer to distort reality through the egotistical imagination which usurps reality. By no longer assuming the union between the real and the imaginative (an assumption dismissed as 'the last distortion of romance'), Crispin leaves behind the egotistical self, who once announced, 'Nota: man is the intelligence of his soil, / The sovereign ghost'. The defeat of the imagination against the powerful pressure of reality is summed up in the title for the first section, 'The World without Imagination'. Crispin, as 'an introspective voyager' (*CP*, 29), learns through the 'reality-imagination complex' a lesson which negates any facile reconciliation between the two terms. Even so the poet's belief in the imagination is shown in his seriocomical adventure of Crispin.

Crispin's exploration develops in the second section, 'Concerning the Thunderstorms of Yucatan', where the defeat of the imagination against reality gives Crispin another recognition:

> He knelt in the cathedral with the rest,
> This connoisseur of elemental fate,
> Aware of exquisite thought. The storm was one
> Of many proclamations of the kind,
> Proclaiming something harsher than he learned
> From hearing signboards whimper in cold nights

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[59] Bornstein, Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens 174.

Or seeing the midsummer artifice
Of heat upon his pane. This was the span
Of force, the quintessential fact, . . . (*CP*, 32-33)

Crispin, who flees to the sanctuary of the cathedral and endures the thunderstorm there, entertains the terrifying idea that the supernatural may not exist. The storm is a mere natural phenomenon. The absence of the supernatural also can be compared with the quotidian reality represented by the whimpering signboard in cold nights and the heated pane in midsummer, since both of them are 'lifeless and inanimate, empty of meaning'.[60] By acknowledging the quotidian reality revealed by the thunderstorm which is an energetic 'proclamation' (*CP*, 32) of natural music without any metaphysical sense, and by this 'quintessential fact', Crispin is inspired to imagine a new self:

And while the torrent on the roof still droned
He felt the Andean breath. His mind was free
And more than free, elate, intent, profound
And studious of a self possessing him,
That was not in him in the crusty town
From which he sailed. Beyond him, westward, lay
The mountainous ridges, purple balustrades,
In which the thunder, lapsing in its clap,
Let down gigantic quavers of its voice,
For Crispin to vociferate again. (*CP*, 33)

Crispin who was purified of his former self feels himself to be 'more than free [from any belief in a metaphysical thing], elate, intent, profound / And studious of a self possessing him'. The freedom from the metaphysical vision which haunts the Romantics so often – Wordsworth tries to seek the divine presence in nature and Shelley desires to glimpse the vanishing apparition – enables the poetic adventurer to write a new Romantic poetry rooted in the earth without heaven and hell. With such freedom and power gained from the thunderstorm, Crispin is

[60] Blessing 21.

ready to 'vociferate' or contend with reality again.

And yet Stevens depicts his hero, Crispin, as a hesitating person who does not have a determined attitude towards the restoration of a more powerful imagination. Crispin fails to be the hero he expected to be. In the third section 'Approaching Carolina' the relation between the imagination and reality and its problem are again considered. Crispin, despite experiencing the change in himself, is still attracted to write 'the book of moonlight'.

> The book of moonlight is not written yet
> Nor half begun, but, when it is, leave room
> For Crispin, fagot in the lunar fire,
> Who, in the hubbub of his pilgrimage
> Through sweating changes, never could forget
> That wakefulness or meditating sleep,
> In which the sulky strophes willingly
> Bore up, in time, the somnolent, deep songs.
> Leave room, therefore, in that unwritten book
> For the legendary moonlight that once burned
> In Crispin's mind above a continent. (*CP*, 33-34)

Though Stevens, familiar with Keats's 'Endymion'[61], would have responded to the lure of the Romantic imagination symbolised as the moon in the poem, he often uses the moon, as Bornstein indicates, for imagination falsely separated from reality.[62] Keats, who admires the beauty of the moon and her power for inspiration to the poet, desires communion with the moon. This urge is realised metaphorically in the form of a passionate embrace between Endymion and the

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[61] From Stevens's Journals dated 18 July 1899 and 19 July 1899.

> In the afternoon I sat in the piano room reading Keats' "Endymion", and listening to the occasional showers on the foliage outside.
>
> The moon was very fine. Coming over the field toward the bridge I turned to see it hanging in the dark east. I felt a thrill at the mystery of the thing and perhaps a little touch of fear. When home I began the third canto of "Endymion" which opens with O moon! And Cynthia! And that sort of thing. It was intoxicating. After glancing at the stars and that queen again from the garden I went to bed at ten.

Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 28-29.

[62] Bornstein, Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens 207.

Moon-goddess, Cynthia. However, the happy ending of their heavenly marriage tells us that what Keats seizes by means of the imagination does not lie in the earthly world. Though the birth of a poet in heaven shows the ideal union of the poet and the Moon-goddess through the poetic imagination, the imagination falsely separated from reality shows the solipsism sometimes fallen into by the Romantic imagination. Crispin vacillates between the moon as the Romantic imagination and the sun as reality.[63] The former might give 'the blissful liaison between himself and his environment' (*CP*, 34) but it seems 'Illusive, faint, more mist than moon, perverse, / Wrong' (*CP*, 34). Stevens, who values the imagination's involvement in reality, rejects the solipsistic nature of the Romantic imagination symbolised as the moon and turns Crispin towards a different direction from Endymion. Through the unstable preference 'between two elements, / A fluctuating between sun and moon' (*CP*, 35), Crispin comes to reject the Romantic moonlight in favour of reality.

The reality to which Crispin returns, in contrast with the misty dreams of the Romantics, is an urban and modern one: the polluted river with a loathsome smell in an industrial town. The poet's wish to 'share the common life' is realised in this very quotidian reality, where Crispin inhaled 'all the arrant stinks / That helped him round his rude æsthetic out' (*CP*, 36) and 'savored rankness like a sensualist' (*CP*, 36). The overstatement of Crispin's appreciation of dirty aspects of reality makes us doubt whether his acceptance is realised in a true sense. There is still something of the savouring aesthete in his acceptance that bears witness to an apartness from reality. However, in whatever way Crispin accepts an abominable reality, it is clear that he is trying to involve the less apparently pleasing aspects of reality as part of the nature of things. This movement towards acceptance enables him to grasp 'the essential prose' (*CP*, 36) or the basic reality.

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[63] Doggett, quoting lines from 'Sunday Morning', indicates Stevens's use of the sun for reality, 'In this early presentation of the sun symbolism that recurs in all the successive volumes of Stevens' poetry, the basic elements are present. The reality for which the sun stands is, as a savage source, a primal base from which the elaborations of an individual understanding of it may arise'. (31)

> . . . It made him see how much
> Of what he saw he never saw at all.
> He gripped more closely the essential prose
> As being, in a world so falsified,
> The one integrity for him, the one
> Discovery still possible to make,
> To which all poems were incident, unless
> That prose should wear a poem's guise at last. (*CP*, 36)

The shifting of the poet's mind between the imagination and reality is succinctly described by a move of syntax in the last two lines. The possibility of the main clause is restricted by the 'unless'-clause: 'all poems' are 'incident' to 'the essential prose' as long as the 'prose' might turn out to 'wear a poem's guise at last'. The endless oscillations between imagination and reality make the poet doubt the sovereignty of the imagination and realise the dominance of reality over the imagination. Therefore, the conditional sentence means that it is necessary for the imagination to work consciously upon reality in order to cover 'the essential prose' or the basic reality with a fictive covering. The change in Crispin's sense of value is reflected in a reversal of the poem's first premise, with which the latter half of the poem begins. The opening of the fourth section, 'The Idea of a Colony' shows Crispin's denial of the solipsistic nature of the first proposition: 'Nota: his soil is man's intelligence / That's better. That's worth crossing seas to find' (*CP*, 36). The rearrangement of words in the first proposition creates a different syntax with a different meaning, namely, that the reality of his mind should not be slayed by the self-conceited view gained through his own intelligence since man's spirit is shaped by his environment. In this sense reality must be dominant over 'man's intelligence'. The absoluteness of the reality means the reverse of the absoluteness of the imagination witnessed in the first proposition.

We noted a little earlier the dynamism of the relation between the imagination and reality. Owing to the violent nature of reality, the force of the imagination must itself assume a powerful counterforce: 'a violence from within that protects

us from a violent without'.[64] Stevens's epistemology of the dynamic relation comes from his view of reality as a chaotic universe in the process of continuous becoming. Therefore, he knows it is impossible simply to impose a man-made form or system upon this chaos to create an order. He also knows it is impossible to confront the chaotic reality with the Romantic imagination in the pejorative sense.

> Exit the mental moonlight, exit lex,
> Rex and principium, exit the whole
> Shebang. Exeunt omnes. Here was prose
> More exquisite than any tumbling verse:
> A still new continent in which to dwell.
> What was the purpose of his pilgrimage,
> Whatever shape it took in Crispin's mind,
> If not, when all is said, to drive away
> The shadow of his fellows from the skies,
> And, from their stale intelligence released,
> To make a new intelligence prevail? (*CP*, 36-37)

As we observed 'the mental moonlight' can be linked with the imagination falsely separated from reality, and furthermore the solipsism of Romantic imagination, Crispin must not fall into such a weak condition. Nor must he impose a 'law' or 'rex' on the universe which in continuous becoming would be unduly dominated by it. Stevens, who knows how the imposing of the imagination on reality loses the balance between the two terms, offers a complex view of the relation between them in 'Anecdote of the Jar' (1919). He illustrates:

> I placed a jar in Tennessee,
> And round it was, upon a hill.
> It made the slovenly wilderness
> Surround that hill. (*CP*, 76)

The poem begins with the act of 'placing a jar', which means the occurrence of a centre in a chaotic reality. The jar on a hill is surrounded by the 'slovenly' or

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[64] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 36.

chaotic 'wilderness', but it makes itself the central part. The jar symbolises the product of the imagination, which stands against the wilderness or the world of reality. In the second stanza how reality is ordered by the product of the imagination is described:

> The wilderness rose up to it,
> And sprawled around, no longer wild.
> The jar was round upon the ground
> And tall and of a port in air. (*CP*, 76)

The wilderness to be ordered is represented as if a child was scolded for being slovenly and started to his feet. This comical tone is enhanced by the repeated sound, 'round' in 'surround', 'around' and 'ground'. At the same time by the rhyme of 'round' being repeated the process of ordering reality is emphasised.

But the jar engages with reality in a dominant way. The creation of order which accords with human value risks losing the balance between artefact and nature. This danger is implied in 'dominion'.

> It took dominion everywhere.
> The jar was gray and bare.
> It did not give of bird or bush,
> Like nothing else in Tennessee. (*CP*, 76)

Therefore the wilderness 'sprawled around' in a subjugated way. The relation between the jar and the wilderness is like the master-servant relationship. However, the jar masters its servant in a solipsistic way. The jar, which was 'gray and bare', 'did not give of bird or bush'. In other words the jar, owing to its bareness, resembles a dominating king, assuming an egotistic sublime. Stevens's jar is similar to Keats's urn in that both of the artefacts represent a solipsistic existence which rejects a harmonious union with their surroundings. The beauty embodied in Keats's urn appears to contrast with the transient beauty of everyday life. Artistic work created through the imagination threatens to be an egotistic representation. Here Stevens shows a difficult aspect of artistic activity in the interrelation between art and nature. The failure of the interrelation lies in the

imposition of an oppressive order by the artistic work on reality, resulting in the distortion of reality. Stevens's concern for a tricky aspect of the 'reality-imagination complex' is treated in the poem. Similarly in 'The Comedian as the Letter C' Stevens denies any systems that man imposes upon reality by saying, 'Exit the mental moonlight, exit lex, / Rex and principium, exit the whole / Shebang' (*CP*, 36-37). After the lesson condensed in the proposition, 'Nota: his soil is man's intelligence', he frees himself from 'the whole / Shebang' to 'make a new intelligence prevail' (*CP*, 37).

Before returning to 'The Comedian as the Letter C', one more aspect of the uniqueness of Stevens's jar must be clarified. Stevens's jar which gives us the barren image is completely different from Keats's 'Grecian Urn' which is artistically ornamented. Unlike Keats's urn filled with mythological imagery, Stevens's jar is worldly. It is placed in a real place, 'Tennessee'. Against Keats's Romantic artistic work, Stevens creates an American art which is simple like unglazed pottery. Stevens's preference for this unpretentious American art can be again witnessed in 'The Comedian as the Letter C'. 'The poem's chief energy', according to Vendler, 'is spent on rejecting European aestheticism and asserting that all poetry must be native to its region'.[65] Doggett indicates, similarly, that Stevens rephrases the proposition, 'Nota: his soil is man's intelligence' in 'Anecdote of Men by the Thousand' (*CP*, 51): 'The soul, he said, is composed / Of the external world'. Through the style of the poem, dominated by uses of the possessive case, the poet shows the close connection of the native to its land: 'The dress of a woman of Lhassa, / In its place, / Is an invisible element of that place / Made visible'. According to Doggett, 'Even the self becomes a configuration and essence of surrounding reality in a naturalistic poem; therefore, it is fitting that Crispin considers man to be only a product of the complex of what is specific for a certain place and time'.[66] And the native song in America 'could be played on the unpretentious little harmonium, or the guitar or banjo, but not on the psaltery or

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[65] Helen Vendler, ed. 'Wallace Stevens' in Voices & Visions: The Poet in America (New York: Random, 1987) 133.
[66] Doggett 27.

lyre of Europe'.[67]

> The man in Georgia waking among pines
> Should be pine-spokesman. The responsive man,
> Planting his pristine cores in Florida,
> Should prick thereof, not on the psaltery,
> But on the banjo's categorical gut,
> Tuck, tuck, while the flamingoes flapped his bays. (*CP*, 38)

Through the acceptance of things as they are, a suitable style for Stevens's American music can be found, which is 'More exquisite than any tumbling verse' (*CP*, 37). Stevens, who cannot be content with 'counterfeit, / With masquerade of thought, with hapless words / That must belie the racking masquerade' (*CP*, 39), values native poetry rooted in American soil as a means of attaining a new Romanticism.

Stevens's experimental attempts in creating American poetry entail various problems, as we have examined, such as the rescue of the poetic imagination from the problem of Romantic solipsism and the fact that poetic creativity involves intricate fluctuations between the imagination and reality. Overcoming these problems, the poet's hero must reinterpret the Romantic tradition and make it valid as a living experience. In the last two sections Crispin arrives at some compromise. The goal of Crispin's introspective quest ends with an unexpected result. 'Because he built a cabin who once planned / Loquacious columns by the ructive sea' (*CP*, 41). Far from the majestic dome of Kubla Khan, Crispin's cabin is too modest for the epic hero. Though the life of Crispin can be said to be profitless, 'beginning with green brag, / Concluding fadedly' (*CP*, 46), the poem is not a tragedy but a comedy; he is content with his settlement in a 'Nice Shady Home' with his daughters, surrounded by the quotidian reality. The poem's title, 'The Comedian as the Letter C', shows Stevens taking a self-mocking pose through his persona, Crispin as the anti-hero and comedian. Stevens, with his own version of a foppish comedian, parodies his own position as the poet, exaggerating the

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[67] Vendler, Voices & Visions 134.

unheroic ending in ordinary experience. By setting his American epic in reality to offer an undistorted vision of things as they are, Stevens confirms his 'lifelong belief that the poet's lot is the common lot'[68]. Out of the quotidian reality he must produce 'the reverberations in the words / Of his first central hymns, the celebrants / Of rankest trivia, tests of the strength / Of his æsthetic, his philosophy' (*CP*, 37). The poet who creates a supreme fiction can be said to become an American hero in a new Romanticism.

The reciprocal relation gained through dealing with the 'reality-imagination complex' creates a fiction in which we live in the world by making it live in us. It is helpful to look briefly at Stevens's emphasis on the 'fiction' before turning to a closer examination of it in the next chapters. Stevens says, 'What we see in the mind is as real to us as what we see by the eye'.[69] This statement is exemplified in 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird' (1917).

I

Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II

I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

. . .

XII

The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.

XIII

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[68] Vendler, Voices & Visions 133.
[69] Stevens, 'Adagia' in Opus Posthumous 188.

It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs. (*CP*, 92-95)

In the first stanza, the movement of the 'eye of the blackbird' is added to the landscape of 'twenty snowy mountains', creating a vivid contrast yet connection between the fixed mountains, whose reality is strengthened by being numbered as 'twenty', and the moving eye of the blackbird. Susan B. Weston, quoting the word 'sensation' from Stevens's letter in which he says, 'This group of poems is not meant to be a collection of epigrams or of ideas, but of sensations',[70] suggests 'two possible puns, "moving" and "eye"' and interprets the stanza as follows:

> . . . the perceiver is an emotionally moved I. This kind of ambiguity melts the eye of the bird with the I of the speaker, and the seen with the unseen. In this way, the bird functions to link the observer to the landscape, at the same time creating the "sensation" or mood of the linking.[71]

The 'twenty snowy mountains' are like the barren landscape of 'The Snow Man'. The movement of the eye of the blackbird shows the active mind of sensation working upon a barren landscape and recreating it and giving it a meaning. Richard Gray also suggests that the poem illustrates how the mind perceives reality by discovering the interdependent relationship between imagination and reality: 'The blackbird provides a focal point for the landscape which it composes, just as a compositional centre composes a landscape painting. This is a paradigm of the way the mind orders reality by discovering significant relations in it'.[72] The blackbird provides a centre as well as a strong accent in an Imagist poem of the landscape and gives a meaning to reality. Without the blackbird the landscape

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[70] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 251.
[71] Susan B. Weston, Wallace Stevens: An Introduction to the Poetry (New York: Columbia UP, 1977) 21.
[72] Richard Gray, ed., American Poetry of the Twentieth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976) 168.

turns to a mere and barren reality.

The poem consists of a set of variations on a theme of the 'reality-imagination complex', dramatising how the imagining mind relates to reality. In the second stanza the imagination is working like 'Negative Capability' which could be witnessed in 'The Snow Man'. By identifying with the natural world through the imagination, the poet establishes the contact with the natural world. Like Keats who claimed in his letter that 'if a Sparrow come before my Window I take part in its existence and pick about the Gravel'[73], Stevens projects his own personality into the blackbird as the object of contemplation. The dramatisation of how the imagining mind relates to reality is linguistically 'illustrated by the use of the blackbird as a simile; namely, the discovery of connections between apparently unconnected things'.[74] In the twelfth stanza, the flight of the imagination 'must' adapt itself to the process of becoming. The function of the imagination must correspond with the living world since through the resemblance the relation between imagination and reality is created. The last stanza assumes a quite different aspect from the first stanza. Here, the static representation of the blackbird reverses the implications of the first stanza. Against the snowing world, the blackbird is motionless on the cedar limbs. The stanza is interpreted to suggest the image of death by some critics. The motionless blackbird might suggest, in Blessing's words, a 'sinister, death-like presence in the midst of a universe of flux'.[75] But a more positive interpretation is possible since the imagining mind is at work: 'it was going to snow'. And we can imagine the blackbird covered with snow merging into its white surroundings. Robert Rehder argues perceptively that

> This is a poem about perception which demonstrates that each act of vision re-creates reality and that every perception is a metaphor. . . . Interpretation is kept to a minimum so that the image interprets itself. Our attention, in being so completely focused on the thing seen, is thereby

[73] Keats, The Letters of John Keats 1: 186.
[74] Gray 168.
[75] Blessing 27. See also Weston who says that 'the bird is now an omen of death'(23).

> concentrated upon itself, and we are compelled to an imaginative re-enactment, made self-conscious of our seeing.[76]

Through the imaginative re-enactment in relation to external reality, we share the experience of the interdependent relationship between the two terms and what we see in the mind becomes as real as what we see by the eyes. Thus the poem shows a successful example of the 'reality-imagination complex', exemplifying how a fiction provides access to reality.

The subject of the 'reality-imagination complex' becomes a fundamental principle for Stevens's poetry. Miller says,

> Imagination is the inner nothingness, while reality is the barren external world with which imagination carries on its endless intercourse. Stevens' problem is to reconcile the two. But such a reconciliation turns out to be impossible. This way and that vibrates his thought, seeking to absorb imagination by reality, to engulf reality in imagination, or to marry them in metaphor. Nothing will suffice, and Stevens is driven to search on tirelessly for some escape from conflict. This endless seeking is the motive and life of his poetry. The human self, for him, is divided against itself. One part is committed to the brute substance of earth, things as they are, and the other just as tenaciously holds to its need for imaginative grandeur. Self-division, contradiction, perpetual oscillation of thought – these are the constants in Stevens's work.[77]

Stevens's works such as the poems and the essays, collected in The Necessary Angel, are variations on the endless oscillations between imagination and reality. Stevens's treatment of the division between the imagination and reality, which the Romantics also suffer, is subtle. What makes him an authentic and original heir of Romanticism is his poetic treatment of the 'reality-imagination complex'. To avoid usurpation by reality, the imagination must become violent enough to protect itself from the violence without. To avoid usurpation by the imagination, the adherence

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[76] Robert Rehder, The Poetry of Wallace Stevens (New York: St. Martin's P, 1988) 59.
[77] Miller 145-46.

to reality becomes fundamental. The equilibrium between the two is established in a very tense relation. To put Steven's success in Rehder's words, 'His poetry grows out of this tension, this dynamic antithesis'.[78] Stevens's post-Romantic consciousness about the imagination is significant; he acknowledges that the imagination can become the mind's own reality. 'To the One of Fictive Music' illustrates the gap between what the poet has in his mind and what the imagination brings through fiction. Rejecting what is unlike and also craving for the fiction, Stevens is seeking for what be called 'verisimilitude of the fiction'. Miller's words, 'This endless seeking is the motive and life of his poetry', are appropriate. In Harmonium the development of his poetry out of the 'reality-imagination complex' is exemplified very well. It provides the potentialities from which the fruitful union involved in Stevens's new Romanticism will be realised.

[78] Rehder 135.

Chapter 4: Stevens's Development towards New Romanticism

In this chapter, again focusing on Harmonium, I shall explore further Steven's treatment of the 'reality-imagination complex' in the context of his ideas about a new Romanticism. The preceding chapter suggested that Stevens gives fiction the status of reality, albeit a reality of the mind. Acknowledging what is invented by the imagination as unreal, Stevens sees the poetic experience gained through the fiction as taking on its own truth. In his poetical works, as we have seen, Stevens often treats the subject of poetry itself, showing how poetry is created through the conflict between the imagination and reality. After examining how the imagination and reality interact with each other in a complex relationship, we are now ready to consider fiction in connection with the 'reality-imagination complex'. To clarify what his new Romanticism is, I shall explore the ideas of the fiction as a substitute for reality and then for religion.

It was observed in the previous chapters that, despite differences on detailed points, the Romantics share a longing for transcendental order in the world of appearances, an order achieved through the imagination. The problem lies in the fact that not all the Romantics achieved a reconciliation between inner vision and outer experience through the synthetic power of the imagination. Though the Romantics achieve moments of reconciliation, they cannot sustain them, which leads to disillusion. As Gelpi points out

> Romanticism, then, rested on the assumption that meaning – and therefore expression – proceeded from the momentary gestalt, wherein subject and object not merely encountered each other but completed, or at least potentially completed, each other. This personal and individual experience of potential correspondence . . . was also the source of Romantic instability and self-doubt, and so the genesis of Modernism.[1]

The modernists were sceptical about this momentary harmonisation owing to the 'instability' and 'self-doubt' of such visionary moments. We should remember that

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[1] Gelpi 4.

the precarious state of the imagination and self-doubt about the function of the imagination led to a loss of balanced harmony. The problem of usurpation by both the imagination and reality in Wordsworth's poetry shows an example of 'the instability' in the reconciliation. Coleridge's 'guilty self-doubt' casts a shadow over his definition of the imagination as that which reconciles opposites. Shelley's poetic quest opens a gap between imagination and reality.

The modernists experienced a social crisis similar to the Romantics in that they had the catastrophic experience of World War I. However, unlike the Romantics who wished to believe that through the imagination they could reconcile mind and world, the modernists found that this mode of ordering the world would not accord with the disorder which they were facing. Against the Romantics who hankered for the unity in individual vision, Gelpi argues, the modernists tried to realise unity in the artwork itself.

> The Modernists proceeded from a skeptical, experimental, relativistic, even materialistic base to seek an absolute realization and expression which internal and external circumstances seemed to rule out. But for them the notion of the absolute functioned no longer as a measure of experience but as a measure of aesthetic performance.[2]

The modernists claimed that 'an aesthetic absolute . . . inhered not in Nature, but in the work itself.'[3] The Romantics tried to experience a true communion with the external world. This is because, as Abrams suggests, they desired to reunite the isolated self with nature.[4] The transition from the 'experience' of the Romantics to the 'aesthetic performance' of the modernists shows a change of literary mode, which was already identified by Regueiro as 'a trend in contemporary criticism to discard the categories of imagination and reality as valid critical terms and to view the relationships posited by the poem as existing within the poem itself'.[5]

Stevens's poetry has some elements which make his poetics modern and an

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[2] Gelpi 4.
[3] Gelpi 5.
[4] See Chapter 1, 1.
[5] Regueiro 10. On this subject, see Chapter 1, 45-46.

example of new Romanticism. We have already examined how Stevens shares with the Romantics a belief in the imagination which has an essential relation to truth and reality. His 'reality-imagination complex' develops possibilities to realise a new Romanticism. The relation between imagination and reality is repeatedly described in The Necessary Angel. In his statement, 'He [the poet] must create his unreal out of what is real',[6] we can find Stevens's attempt to rescue the poetic imagination from the problem of solipsism experienced by the Romantics. Against the Romantic in a pejorative sense, Stevens's poetical view assumes strictness. To quote from 'Three Academic Pieces', 'The accuracy of accurate letters is an accuracy with respect to the structure of reality'. Stevens continues, 'Thus, if we desire to formulate an accurate theory of poetry, we find it necessary to examine the structure of reality, because reality is the central reference for poetry'[7]. Through the adherence of the imagination to reality which Stevens regards as fundamental, poetry becomes the 'credible' in life: 'poetic truth is the truth of credible things'.[8] The failure in the relation between imagination and reality is due to the pressure of reality. Romanticism failed to resolve the tense relationship between the two terms. To confront reality, adherence to it is essential. Stevens's rescue of the poetic imagination from the problem of solipsistic imagination involves a confrontation of the poet with reality. The English Romantics regard the imagination as an essential, without which poetry does not exist. Stevens also has the same view. However, in his defiant attitude towards the force of reality we can find a new Romanticism.

Furthermore what makes Stevens different from the Romantics and justifies the description of his poetry as a new Romanticism is the fact that he creates poetry or fiction on the premise that what he imagines is not real. 'To the One of Fictive Music' is evidence of this. To create a fiction, the poet must rehearse but go beyond Romantic conflicts between the imagination and reality. In Stevens, the imagination thrives on the real and conflicts with the pressure of reality by

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[6] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 58.
[7] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 71.
[8] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 53.

pressing back against it. The interaction of the imagination and reality is repeatedly treated by Stevens. In 'Domination of Black' the imagination yielded to the overpowering reality. On the contrary, in 'Anecdote of the Jar' the oppressive order imposed by the artistic work on reality is represented. Stevens says, 'It is not only that the imagination adheres to reality, but, also, that reality adheres to the imagination and that the interdependence is essential'.[9] This remark shows how the imagination and reality are interdependent on each other and have a tense relationship. At the same time it also suggests the difficulty of balancing the two terms. The process of creating an order out of the conflict or violent interaction between the imagination and reality is shown in 'Earthy Anecdote'. In the balanced interaction we can find the reconciliation of imagination and reality. It was observed in the previous chapter that Stevens shares with Coleridge a fascination with the synthetic power of the imagination which reconciles opposites. Thus Stevens says, 'The imagination is the power that enables us to perceive the normal in the abnormal, the opposite of chaos in chaos'.[10] And the poet desires to reconcile the two conflicting terms. In this reconciliation poetry provides 'the one reality / In this imagined world' ('Another Weeping Woman', *CP*, 25).

'Life is Motion' (1919) offers a good example of reconciliation between the imagination and reality. In the poem the wild 'Oklahoma' of 'Earthy Anecdote' turns into a celebratory place for the marriage of human beings and nature, of the imagination and reality.

> In Oklahoma,
> Bonnie and Josie,
> Dressed in calico,
> Danced around a stump.
> They cried,
> "Ohoyaho,
> Ohoo" . . .

[9] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 33.
[10] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 153. See also Chapter 1, 13-14.

Celebrating the marriage

Of flesh and air. (*CP*, 83)

Robert Buttel's explanation of the word 'motion' is helpful to quote here. He observes that it is 'an abstract word for the flux of the physical world as well as for the sympathetic movement of the mind'.[11] The poem expresses a Wordsworthian exaltation at the moment of communion with nature. When the heart leaps with joy, life is filled with motions of the mind and nature. The central theme of Harmonium is here celebrated by means of a wedding song, a prothalamion. The words of the song consist of ordinary things such as the everyday names of 'Bonnie' and 'Josie' and 'calico' for everyday wear. The place name, 'Oklahoma', makes the song American. The union of man with nature is attained by the union of the imagination with reality. This motif is interlaced between old and new poems in Stevens's world.

In one of his later poems, 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction' (1942), by addressing the personified terra as 'fat girl, terrestrial', 'my green, my fluent mundo' ('It Must Give Pleasure', *CP*, 406, 407) in the way that he might address a lover, Stevens shows an idealised, if humorous, union between the imagination and reality. And Stevens's systematic use of terms for reality and the union of it and the imagination can be often witnessed in his poetical and prose works. Bornstein indicates that "'*green*' is Stevens' word for reality and '*mundo*' for the world transformed by imagination".[12] Since Stevens's idea about 'mundo' is well discussed by Kermode, it is useful to quote his argument here.

> "The poem is a nature created by the poet",[13] and all his poems, presided over by the same personality, make one great world. Stevens thought of his poetry as a world, which, to distinguish it from the "real" world, he called his *mundo*. . . . and this world is created by the union of reality and the imagination; it is the world of what Stevens called the Supreme

[11] Robert Buttel, Wallace Stevens: The Making of Harmonium (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1967) 54.
[12] Bornstein, Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens 229.
[13] Stevens, 'Adagia' in Opus Posthumous 192.

> Fiction. Over the skeleton of reality the mind weaves its always changing, always delightful, fictive covering.[14]

Owing to this union, reality is transformed into 'the mundo of the imagination in which the imaginative man delights'.[15]

We may recall here that Stevens admires the firm adherence to reality of Wordsworth's imagination in the sonnet 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge'. After quoting some lines from the sonnet, Stevens says, 'if we have this experience, we know how poets help people to live their lives'.[16] As Doggett points out, 'Stevens is always aware that perception is a complex psychological occurrence. The real external world unfolds within our experience of it – and experience is the very life of the self.'[17] Stevens's sense of real life lies in his regard for the significance of our own experience and of the world. Emphasising the activity of the imagination, its incessant creation, Stevens also describes the interdependence between the supreme fiction and real life as follows:

> There is, in fact, a world of poetry indistinguishable from the world in which we live, or, I ought to say, no doubt, from the world in which we shall come to live, since what makes the poet the potent figure that he is, or was, or ought to be, is that he creates the world to which we turn incessantly and without knowing it and that he gives to life the supreme fictions without which we are unable to conceive of it.[18]

The whole reality is transformed into a fiction 'to which we turn incessantly and . . . without which we are unable to conceive of it [life]'. Doggett argues that the fiction can be 'part of man and part of his real existence' by quoting a phrase from 'The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet': 'I am myself a part of what is real'[19]. And then he continues: 'Stevens finds the real to be truly imagined and the imagined to be

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[14] Kermode 24.
[15] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 57-58.
[16] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 31. On this subject, see Chapter 1, 40-41.
[17] Doggett 5.
[18] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 31.
[19] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 63.

truly real'.[20] The mind, by the imagination, can create the world of poetry, which turns into the mind's own reality. Bloom approvingly quotes Doggett's argument about Stevens's view of reality.

> *Reality*, in Stevens' use of the word, may be the world supposed to be antecedent in itself or the world created in the specific occurrence of thought, including the thinker himself and his mind forming the thought. . . . Sometimes *reality* is used in the context of the nominalist position – then the word denotes that which is actual and stands as a phenomenal identity, the existent as opposed to the merely fancied. Stevens usually means by *reality* an undetermined base on which a mind constructs its personal sense of the world. Occasionally he will use the word *real* as a term of approval, as a substitute for the word *true*, and, therefore, no more than an expression of confidence.[21]

After making these remarks, Doggett succinctly comments: 'Stevens' poetry envisions a world burgeoning in the flow of consciousness and created continually in his sense of it. Stevens finds the actual to be an intermutation of an outer reality and the life within'.[22] Poetry, whose artistic value lies in giving a harmonious order to reality, could become part of reality despite the autonomous world of the imagination. Here we recall 'the one reality / In this imagined world'. The verisimilitude gained through the supreme fiction promises an essential connection with life, which can be the very source of spiritual energy. The aesthetic experience is transient, since the fiction quickly dies. However, it gives the poet and the reader something valuable as a spiritual remedy: 'we know how poets help people to live their lives'.

Here we get nearer to Stevens's almost sacred view of poetry. And it is necessary for us to examine how, for him, poetry relates to life. In his letter he says, 'The major poetic idea in the world is and always has been the idea of God. One of

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[20] Doggett 106.
[21] Doggett 200. Bloom, quoting these lines, takes a similar view to Doggett's. Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1976) 307.
[22] Doggett 201.

the visible movements of the modern imagination is the movement away from the idea of God.'[23] Stevens's imaginative 'mundo', gained through abstracting and rearranging the raw material of experience, does not have any metaphysical vision but is grounded in the poet's own vision of reality. Stevens says,

> The relation of art to life is of the first importance, especially in a skeptical age since, in the absence of a belief in God, the mind turns to its own creations and examines them, not alone from the aesthetic point of view, but for what they reveal, for what they validate and invalidate, for the support that they give.[24]

Therefore, Stevens, who believes in the use of poetry as life's redemption,[25] apotheosises the poetic imagination. This is described in his letter as follows: 'the idea of pure poetry, essential imagination, as the highest objective of the poet, appears to be, at least potentially, as great as the idea of God'.[26] The preceding chapter pointed to Beckett's account of Santayana's influence on Stevens's poetic use of the idea of music. Beckett also argues that Santayana's post-Christian view permeates Stevens's work by quoting from the 'Preface' to Interpretations of Poetry and Religion: 'Religion and Poetry are identical in essence, . . . Poetry is called religion when it intervenes in life, and religion, when it merely supervenes upon life, is seen to be nothing but poetry'.[27] Stevens's belief in poetry is founded on ground more substantial than faith. With his resolute challenge to supreme fiction Stevens 'writes poetry, then, in order to approach the good in what is harmonious and orderly'.[28]

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[23] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 378.

[24] Stevens, 'Adagia' in Opus Posthumous 186.

[25] Stevens, 'Adagia' in Opus Posthumous 186. He also says in 'Adagia', 'After one has abandoned a belief in god, poetry is that essence which takes its place as life's redemption' (185)

[26] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 369.

[27] After arguing for the interrelationship between Santayana and Stevens (25-29), Beckett arrives at the following conclusion.

> Santayana's influence on Stevens was altogether different, in kind, in duration, and in intensity. It was not only that Santayana's critical ideas, some of them much elaborated, remained permanently at the centre of Stevens's thought, so that the vision of the poet's task sketched by Santayana comes to seem a bright unbroken thread reappearing again and again throughout Stevens's work. (29)

[28] Stevens , 'The Irrational Element in Poetry' in Opus Posthumous 228.

Stevens usually believes that his creation is somehow concerned with reality, and this belief sustains his work. However, the omnipresence of death is manifest in reality. And the poet's consciousness of death intervenes in the relation between imagination and reality. In order to attain the reconciliation between the two, Stevens allows their relation to become more intricate, an intricacy that is bound up with the need for philosophical understanding. 'Le Monocle de Mon Oncle' (1918), in spite of a self-mocking pose comically pervading the poem, assumes a tone of grief over man's mortal limitations as well as his artistic problem. Each situation in each stanza seems to be independent but each stanza describes the same theme: mutability. In the poem the idea of mutability as a recurrent motif is examined from various examples, showing us the process by which the poet reaches a compromise with reality.

The poet of middle age narrates the transient and potentially tragic nature of existence by addressing a phantasmagoric woman-figure, who is also an ageing woman, muse and Venus.

> "Mother of heaven, regina of the clouds,
> O scepter of the sun, crown of the moon,
> There is not nothing, no, no, never nothing,
> Like the clashed edges of two words that kill."
> And so I mocked her in magnificent measure.
> Or was it that I mocked myself alone? (*CP*, 13)

The poem opens with the invocation of a perfect woman in an exaggerating way which makes praise indistinguishable from compliment. Then the discourteous nuance is made clear when, in a riddle-like sentence, 'There is not nothing, no, no, never nothing, / Like the clashed edges of two words that kill', Stevens reveals to us that he 'mocked her in magnificent measure'. However he quickly denies mocking her by wondering, 'Or was it that I mocked myself alone?', thus suggesting a problem to do with himself.

To get the poet's true feelings or to 'uncrumple this much-crumpled thing' (*CP*, 13), it is helpful to have recourse to interpretations by some critics. Vendler

suggests a biographical interpretation: the 'last vanquished adolescent energies of love and faith' are 'now exhausted in a depleted marriage'.[29] Bloom argues that in the 'bravura first stanza . . . the imagery of presence and absence refers less to the muse (now bedraggled) or the beloved (now somewhat faded) than to the language of passion; the tropes of her hyperbolical anteriority now become the catachreses of her inadequate presence'.[30] MacCaffrey says that it is possible to 'reconstruct a skeletal system of assumptions that lie behind this poem'. According to her, 'The reconstruction would proceed as follows. Poetry's most important subjects belong to "the wordless world", the world of Eros, who, alas (or perhaps fortunately), is dumb'[31]. Though MacCaffrey and Bloom seem to supply different interpretations, we can find some points which are compatible. Owing to the loss of a passionate language, it is more difficult to reconstruct the 'wordless world':

> I wish that I might be thinking stone.
> The sea of spuming thought foists up again
> The radiant bubble that she was. And then
> A deep up-pouring from some saltier well
> Within me, bursts its watery syllable. (*CP*, 13)

The poet shows his preference for 'a thinking stone' over an unpromising inspiration which is only a 'watery syllable' and which foists a bygone memory of 'the radiant bubble that she was' upon him. 'She' is Venus as well as muse, who is no longer born within his 'saltier well'. In the second stanza the loss of poetic inspiration is again deplored by the poet who has passed the highest point of his career and must retire: 'No spring can follow past meridian' (*CP*, 13). The poet, who cannot forget the past glory, persistently recalls it. MacCaffrey, quoting Stevens's comments on the poem,[32] indicates the similarity between the poem and

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[29] Helen Vendler, On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens' Longer Poems (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1969) 59.
[30] Bloom, Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate 37.
[31] MacCaffrey 201.
[32] Protesting against his correspondent's 'much too close' reading, Stevens insists that 'I had in mind simply a man fairly well along in life, looking back and talking in a more or less personal way about life'. Letters of Wallace Stevens 251.

Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality'.

> The retrospective point of view establishes each poem as an instance of what both poets are talking about: the fact that an unbridgeable gap yawns between experience and the articulation of experience. The intensities of childhood or first love – "fiery boys" and "sweet-smelling virgins" – contrasted with the sobrieties of middle age, manifest this troublesome disjunction: the distance between words and things, reality and its reflection in art, the deep sources of poems and poems themselves, all surface and bravura.[33]

Both of the poets nostalgically recollect some vestiges of what is lost now since they strongly feel a discontinuity between living experience and the articulation of experience. They can speak only their inability to retrieve the lost integrity. The Romantic sense of loss in Wordsworth is transformed humorously in Stevens's poem. Through the interior monologue with his ageing lover, the poet with the sobriety of middle age discerns fluctuations in things and in his sexuality, which also reflect the artistic problem of filling the disjunction between 'words and things, reality and its reflection in art'.

If the idea that reality is circumscribed by time and therefore by death is considered as negative, it casts a shadow over what is ageing. To overcome mortality it is necessary to have a philosophical understanding. Therefore the recognition that all living creatures are bound to return to the earth coaxes the poet to accept passing time and the loss of passion. In 'Anatomy of Monotony' (1930) the notion of the earth as both a womb and tomb is clearly described.

> If from the earth we came, it was an earth
> That bore us as a part of all the things
> It breeds and that was lewder than it is.
> Our nature is her nature. Hence it comes,
> Since by our nature we grow old, earth grows

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[33] MacCaffrey 207.

The same. We parallel the mother's death. (*CP*, 107-08)

Out of the earth we came in the beginning (at birth) and to the earth we will have to return in the end (at death). In both senses the earth is the only place given to us without any metaphysical meaning. The fifth stanza of 'Le Monocle de Mon Oncle' also treats the same theme as 'Anatomy of Monotony'. The 'furious star' (*CP*, 14) of intense youthful love dwindles into the 'firefly's quick, electric stroke' (*CP*, 15). The loss of sexual power is part of an ageing process or the cyclic progress in life. The acquiescent acceptance of this is shown in the poet's telling the woman to

> . . . Remember how the crickets came
> Out of their mother grass, like little kin,
> In the pale nights, when your first imagery
> Found inklings of your bond to all that dust. (*CP*, 15)

The poet also beholds the inevitable progression in cyclicity in love, which comes, blooms, bears its fruit and dies: 'I behold, in love, / An ancient aspect touching a new mind. / It comes, it blooms, it bears its fruit and dies.' (*CP*, 16). 'This trivial trope' (*CP*, 16) of ageing love and transience of life 'reveals a way of truth' (*CP*, 16) or the 'first, foremost law' (*CP*, 17), which is succinctly described in the line: 'The honey of heaven may or may not come, / But that of earth both comes and goes at once' (*CP*, 15). In the age of 'the loss of belief in the sort of God'[34] we cannot have any metaphysical visions but what we know as certain is that on the earth all things are in flux.

In the sixth stanza the poet applies the 'first, foremost law' of change and cyclicity to the ageing imagination, which is symbolised by the colour of ephemeral blue.

> If men at forty will be painting lakes
> The ephemeral blues must merge for them in one,
> The basic slate, the universal hue.

[34] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 348.

There is a substance in us that prevails. (*CP*, 15)

According to fluctuations discerned in ageing life, the imagination as a substantial thing must be subject to change. Blue stands, in Stevens's colour-system, for imagination, so that 'the ephemeral blues' are the imagination which is affected by ephemeral things in life. From the perspective of the ageing imagination it is difficult to 'attend each quirky turn' (*CP*, 15) of youthful love. And we wonder: how does the poet grasp the mutable and dynamic nature of reality? The poet's answer is a comical and discouraging one.

When amorists grow bald, then amours shrink
Into the compass and curriculum
Of introspective exiles, lecturing.
It is a theme for Hyacinth alone. (*CP*, 15)

The ageing imagination cannot have an amorous union with reality; the product of their interaction cannot be poetry but pedantries, 'introspective exiles, lecturing.' The pressure of the imagination may not be strong enough to press back against pitiless reality. The pedantic language cannot satisfy the poet's desire to make his own poetry a 'great hymn' able to 'celebrate / The faith of forty' (*CP*, 16).

The poet quizzes 'all sounds, all thoughts, all everything / For the music and manner of the paladins' (*CP*, 16) to make the poem fit as an oblation to Cupid.

In verses wild with motion, full of din,
Loudened by cries, by clashes, quick and sure
As the deadly thought of men accomplishing
Their curious fates in war, come, celebrate
The faith of forty, ward of Cupido.
Most venerable heart, the lustiest conceit
Is not too lusty for your broadening.
I quiz all sounds, all thoughts, all everything
For the music and manner of the paladins
To make oblation fit. Where shall I find
Bravura adequate to this great hymn? (*CP*, 16)

Stevens's verses themselves seem to rattle, composed of noises generated by waging a war against reality – the cries of warriors and a clash of swords in the battle of life. The clashing noise corresponds with 'the clashed edges of two words' in the first stanza where the poet adopts a self-mocking pose. The poet who has recourse not to Romantic language but to noisy sounds of 'magnificent measure' (*CP*, 13) ridicules his verse style. O'Neill's interpretation helps us to understand the nature of Stevens's self-mockery. According to O'Neill, his self-mockery shows 'how much defensive insecurity surrounds Stevens's use of "magnificent measure". Or rather it reveals Stevens as able to create an effective and affecting rhetoric of defensive insecurity.'[35] Stevens's American music which does not sound a Romantic music but 'wild with motion, full of din, / Loudened by cries, by clashes' is defended in a tone of self-mockery. The self-mockery brilliantly mimics a lack of confidence in his own literary programme.

Under the guise of comical expressions, the poet's decisive attitude towards poetry can be witnessed. As a modern poet Stevens challenges the Romantic language of the 'fops of fancy' (*CP*, 16) and tries to go beyond it by his own foppish language when he says mockingly that he knows 'no magic trees, no balmy boughs, / No silver-ruddy, gold-vermilion fruits' (*CP*, 16-17).

> The fops of fancy in their poems leave
> Memorabilia of the mystic spouts,
> Spontaneously watering their gritty soils.
> I am a yeoman, as such fellows go.
> I know no magic trees, no balmy boughs,
> No silver-ruddy, gold-vermilion fruits.
> But, after all, I know a tree that bears
> A semblance to the thing I have in mind.
> It stands gigantic, with a certain tip
> To which all birds come sometime in their time.

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[35] O'Neill, Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem 244.

But when they go that tip still tips the tree. (*CP*, 16-17)

MacCaffrey indicates that the stanza is 'central to Stevens' defense of fictions in "Le Monocle"; it brings together explicitly the idea of change and the imagination's need to confront and come to terms with it'.[36] The tinsel products of the Romantic imagination are at odds with the ever-changing reality. What the poet knows is 'a tree that bears / A semblance to the thing I have in mind'. He cannot but have recourse to the matter-of-fact reality without any distortion of it, with which the product of the imagination must be compatible. Stevens's acceptance of mutable nature as it is is also suggested in temporality represented in 'all birds come sometime in their time': Stevens's birds are natural in contrast to Yeats's golden bird in 'Sailing to Byzantium' which is locked up in the world of eternity. The way that each poet deplores the ageing process is quite different. Yeats negates the natural: 'Once out of nature I shall never take / My bodily form from any natural thing'. Stevens's birds of nature shows his recognition that he cannot leave nature and is therefore subject to it.

Though the poem has been haunted by the negative aspects of reality, the poet's recognition of mortal limitation which can be witnessed in the last stanza casts a light on how poetry relates to life. Stevens concludes the poem with the flight of the birds in the sky like the ending of Keats's autumn ode.

A blue pigeon it is, that circles the blue sky,
On sidelong wing, around and round and round.
A white pigeon it is, that flutters to the ground,
Grown tired of flight. . . .
. . . but until now I never knew
That fluttering things have so distinct a shade. (*CP*, 17-18)

Kermode says, 'Finally, as the pigeons flutter to earth, their necessary downward movement produces distinct images; the mellowness of forty's wisdom brings one this knowledge, that the flicker of distinct, ephemeral images is the truth about life

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[36] MacCaffrey 210.

and love on the way to death.'[37] Kermode helps us to define the elegiac tone of the poem's conclusion. The eyes following the figure of the flight are also the same ones as we can find in the final lines of 'Sunday Morning' (1915) written before 'Le Monocle de Mon Oncle':

> And, in the isolation of the sky,
> At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make
> Ambiguous undulations as they sink,
> Downward to darkness, on extended wings. (*CP*, 70)

In the flight of the birds in both poems Stevens pictures a scene of his mind as Keats did in the ode. The elaborate patterns that the pigeons weave in the sky give a 'certain fleeting shapeliness'[38] to their flight. This discovery marks an important accession to a philosophical understanding of ephemeral life. In other words, in spite of the poet's surrender to the physical world of the transient nature of existence, his poetical activity leaves 'so distinct a shade' in our minds. The poet who has this epiphanic moment must have a germinating idea for his poetic creation. Beckett indicates that one of the strengths of 'Le Monocle de Mon Oncle' is the way it 'expresses lack of confidence, "stagnation or conflict" in which the "momentary harmony" that does appear is surrounded by equivocation and doubt', and that 'one of the strengths of "Sunday Morning" is that it is an expression of confidence in the sufficiency of reality which Stevens came only later to see as provisional'[39]. Stevens's poetry progresses by meandering rather than forthright movements. Though 'Le Monocle de Mon Oncle' shows a retreat from 'Sunday Morning', it becomes a bridge to a farther stage of development in his creativity by allowing for a darker view of experience.

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[37] Kermode 45.

[38] Gray 165.

[39] Beckett 76. The quoted words, 'stagnation or conflict' and 'momentary harmony' are from Santayana's Interpretations of Poetry and Religion.

> If we drop the limitation to verbal expression, and think of poetry as that subtle fire and inward light which seems at times to shine through the world and to touch the images in our minds with ineffable beauty, then poetry is a momentary harmony in the soul amid stagnation or conflict, - a glimpse of the divine and an incitation to a religious life. (171)

Stevens repeatedly uses the theme of transience to promote an affirmative view of life. Against Christianity which can seem to deny this world as an appearance and values more highly another world, Stevens finds truth in this world and rejects the idea of another world as a mere fiction. 'The Emperor of Ice-Cream' (1922) illustrates well Stevens's sense of the value of transience, and his attempt to accommodate it in the style of his poetry. According to Stevens, the poem 'wears a deliberately commonplace costume, and yet seems to me to contain something of the essential gaudiness of poetry'.[40] Stevens's aim to create American poetry, which should be unpretentious and closely related to everyday life, yet 'contain something of the essential gaudiness of poetry', is realised. The poem is narrated by someone as if he were the director of a funeral scene. He supervises the performance, telling the characters what to do, and shows us what the transient life signifies to us. And it is the poet's imagination by which real life is transformed into an enticing ice cream.

Call the roller of big cigars,
The muscular one, and bid him whip
In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.
Let the wenches dawdle in such dress
As they are used to wear, and let the boys
Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.
Let be be finale of seem.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

Take from the dresser of deal
Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet
On which she embroidered fantails once
And spread it so as to cover her face.
If her horny feet protrude, they come

[40] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 263. And also see 'On "The Emperor of Ice-Cream"' in Opus Posthumous 212.

To show how cold she is, and dumb.

Let the lamp affix its beam.

The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream. (*CP*, 64)

The characters in the poem are enjoined to attend the funeral in everyday wear: 'Let the wenches dawdle in such dress / As they are used to wear, and let the boys / Bring flowers in last month's newspapers'. The corpse laid out in the bedroom is covered by the used sheet taken from the humble dresser. The people who prepare the funeral do not care whether the sheet cannot cover the whole corpse. Thus the funeral is being conducted as if it were a casual meeting or a part of everyday life. The dramatisation of a strange funeral seems to show the affirmation that death is a part of life and nothing to be treated specially apart from everyday life. The poem which describes life as it is 'wears a deliberately commonplace costume'.

Yet through 'the essential gaudiness of poetry', sensual pleasure in life, which Christianity denies, is expressed amorously. The comical tone is enhanced by the sound effects, including the two rhymes of the [i:m] sound in 'seem', 'cream' and 'beam' and the [m] sound in 'come' and 'dumb', as well as by the deliberately indecorous expressions. In gender terms it is as if the male imagination embraces female reality lovingly. We may recall Stevens's phrase, 'A poet looks at the world somewhat as a man looks at a woman'.[41] The poet's response to the sensual pleasure in life is comparable to a man's response to an attractive woman. This is well illustrated in 'In kitchen cups concupiscent curds'. The alliteration of [k] sound describes the tactile images employed to represent the smooth and creamy texture of ice cream, tempting us to lick its rich flavour. About the eccentric words, 'concupiscent curds', Stevens explains, 'I hope they are expressive. They express the concupiscence of life'.[42] By producing the luscious imagery of ice cream as desirous of being eaten, Stevens implies pure pleasure in life. Though the moment that the pure pleasure lingers on your tongue is very short, as it is with Keats's 'Joy's grape' in the 'Ode on Melancholy', the experience of a distinctive taste

[41] Stevens, 'Adagia' in Opus Posthumous 192.

[42] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 500.

appeals strongly.

The transient image of ice cream works as a synecdoche for life, which Stevens accepts as the only reality in which we live. His resolute statement, 'Let be be finale of seem' tells us to accept death as it is without any meaning added to it. In order to look the fact in the face, the spotlight must be focused upon the death: 'Let the lamp affix its beam'. According to Stevens, 'the true sense of Let be be the finale of seem is let being become the conclusion or denouement of appearing to be: in short, icecream is an absolute good. The poem is obviously not about icecream, but about being as distinguished from seeming to be'.[43] It is because we must not distort death as the finale of a seeming life since it is reality itself which restores the truth. Vendler indicates two rooms juxtaposed: one is the 'sexuality and gluttony of the kitchen'; the other is the bedroom where the corpse of the old woman lies. The 'two-stanza spatial structure' shows 'death and life coexist, side by side'.[44] We can guess that Stevens is dissuading us from reading the poem literally by giving the poem a dual context: one is the sensual pleasure in life and the other is its transience. Though we are perplexed with the coexistence, which enhances the Keats's-like acknowledgement that pleasure is inseparably bound up with transience, we have to accept it as matter-of-fact. The poem is made into a riddle which we have to solve from the total context. Therefore the condensed remark, 'The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream', suggests that the transient life, though it melts into nothingness like ice-cream, is the only reality, to which we are subject; we are encouraged to appreciate pure pleasure, making us realise fully we are alive. What promises us such pleasure can be said to be 'The only emperor'. The poetic manoeuvre comically suggests that the poet comes to terms with a darker side of reality. But we may doubt whether he really comes to terms with the reality of death since the comical and even ironical descriptions of the poem can be seen as a protective covering concealing the darker side.

'A High-Toned Old Christian Woman' (1922) shows in this uncertain world how

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[43] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 341.
[44] Vendler, Wallace Stevens: Words Chosen Out of Desire 50-52.

poetry relates to life. The poem which begins with a declaration, 'Poetry is the supreme fiction, madame', challenges Christianity by creating an earthly paradise through the imagination. By showing a complete secular or hedonistic example of paradise on earth, the poet suggests to the 'high-toned old Christian' a way of saving her spirit without recourse to a religious idea.

> Take the moral law and make a nave of it
> And from the nave build haunted heaven. Thus,
> The conscience is converted into palms,
> Like windy citherns hankering for hymns.
> We agree in principle. That's clear. But take
> The opposing law and make a peristyle,
> And from the peristyle project a masque
> Beyond the planets. (*CP*, 59)

First, Stevens shows the process of creating a 'haunted heaven' or heavenly paradise according to 'the moral law' which is respected by the Christian religion. Then, as its counterpart, he proposes the other process of creating an earthly paradise according to 'the opposing law' to Christianity. The earthly paradise is figuratively represented as a 'masque', which fulfils his imaginative conception of the world of pleasure. Stevens says that both of the paradises promise us the desired end though each of the processes is different: 'Thus, our bawdiness, / Unpurged by epitaph, indulged at last, / Is equally converted into palms[45] (*CP*, 59).

The earthly paradise which satisfies the demands of pleasure should be valued above the heavenly paradise which allows such demands to be confined by 'the moral law'. Against Christianity, Stevens sets a new structure. We assume that Stevens will conceive some sacred substitution of one absolute for another; however, his conceptual production is far more coarse than sacred, approximating to a Dionysian orgy. This is enhanced by the hedonistic parade of 'fictive things' which the widows preoccupied with a puritan morality will reject.

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[45] Stevens uses the image of the palm as the paradise for Christianity. For example 'palm' is used as a synecdoche of the heavenly paradise in 'Sunday Morning', IV (*CP*, 68).

Allow,

Therefore, that in the planetary scene

Your disaffected flagellants, well-stuffed,

Smacking their muzzy bellies in parade,

Proud of such novelties of the sublime,

Such tink and tank and tunk-a-tunk-tunk,

May, merely may, madame, whip from themselves

A jovial hullabaloo among the spheres.

This will make widows wince. But fictive things

Wink as they will. Wink most when widows wince. (*CP*, 59)

Here, the world of the imagination is described as a cheerful parade of masquers who are laughing till their sides ache: 'Your disaffected flagellants, well-stuffed, / Smacking their muzzy bellies in parade, . . . whip from themselves / A jovial hullabaloo'. The comical rhythm in 'tink and tank and tunk-a-tunk-tunk' and the verbal linking of 'wince', 'wink' and 'will' also evoke a laugh. The jovial masque show among the spheres; 'fictive things', in Cook's words, 'like the stars of heaven, may wink and twinkle to all sorts of ends'.[46] In other words Stevens's fictitious show is more universal than any established religion. Thus being enticed into the show, the widows 'wince'. 'Wince' suggests that the widows may suffer emotional distress at the offensive scene or much embarrassment at being attracted to a highly provocative show.

Stevens's comical and coarse description of the show degrades the bold statement, 'Poetry is the supreme fiction', as if he is mocking his belief in poetry. We should notice that he does not describe sonorously the power of the supreme fiction which poetry possesses. Instead, he wittily rebukes the widows' fallacy of

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[46] Cook argues that the implicit meanings of 'wink' are as follows:

> He [Stevens] converts the ancient harmony of the spheres into a "jovial hullabaloo among the spheres", with his favorite pun on "Jove". The last sentence, "Wink most when widows wince", is a tongue twister that asks to be read quick as a wink. As in Shakespeare's "when most I wink", as in the biblical use of "wink at", Stevens' "wink" indicates a "studied refusal to recognize evil", though not quite in the orthodox sense of "evil". Fictive things, like the stars of heaven, may wink and twinkle to all sorts of ends. (103)

imagining a promised world after death. Stevens's statement, 'God is the centre of the pathetic fallacy'[47], must be recalled here. In Harmonium by repeatedly rejecting a transcendental vision of Christianity, Stevens makes much of an earthly paradise. We might also wish to recall Stevens's nihilistic view that 'in the absence of a belief in God, the mind turns to its own creations'.[48] Now that religion has lost its meaning and can no longer serve as the spiritual remedy, Stevens thinks that man's creative nature should replace religion. The loss of assurance in a world after death can be made up by poetry which gives spiritual meaning to life. But it is also true that there is, in his work, a sombre attitude to death as well as a recognition that this world is the only place where we can find paradise. Owing to this sombre attitude, he himself might 'wince' as though he were suspicious of the possibility of the 'supreme fiction'.

However, Stevens creates poetry in order to substantiate the mind's own reality and come to terms with transient life. Stevens says, 'There is, in fact, a world of poetry indistinguishable from the world in which we live, or I ought to say, no doubt, from the world in which we shall come to live'.[49] In 'Tea at the Palaz of Hoon' (1921) Stevens describes how

> Out of my mind the golden ointment rained,
> And my ears made the blowing hymns they heard.
> I was myself the compass of that sea:
>
> I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw
> Or heard or felt came not but from myself;
> And there I found myself more truly and more strange. (*CP*, 65)

The exercise of poetic creation is exalted to that of God: 'Out of my mind the golden ointment rained'. According to Riddel, 'Hoon is the self in all its potential, the imagination as it were at the height of its powers, eloquent and commanding'.[50]

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[47] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 444.
[48] Stevens, 'Adagia' in Opus Posthumous 186.
[49] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 31.
[50] Riddel 64.

Apotheosising the poetic imagination, Stevens shows its potential power to replace religion by poetry. Bornstein develops this argument, referring to the lines quoted above.

> Stevens was in some ways a gnostic without a god and sought in his own hymns to exalt rather than abase man. "We give our good qualities to God, or to various gods, but they come from ourselves", he remarked in parallel to Blake's "All deities reside in the human breast". (LWS [Letters of Wallace Stevens] 295) . . . Here mind and ear create their mighty world not half but wholly. The mind's ointment marks Hoon as a human, the ears' hymns as a poet. As creator of his world, he merges with it in act of self-discovery matching the description of will in "The Noble Rider" as a principle of mind "striving to realize itself in knowing itself".[51]

Comparing the product of the poetic creation to what is indistinguishable from the world in which we live, Stevens shows his confidence in the imagination whose nature can be said to be Romantic. Kermode indicates the importance of the theme of the imagination in Stevens's poetry, quoting Marius Bewley's remark, 'the Coleridgean imagination has become the theme of Stevens' poetry as a whole in a way it never became the theme of Coleridge's poetry as a whole'[52]. The Romantics share the belief that the creative activity of the imagination is akin to that of God. Stevens's belief in the imagination is not very different from theirs. He views the imagination as having some essential relation to truth and reality, and after the Romantics, he is also at pains to assert a similar need to exert the power of the imagination in fashioning a new world of the mind.

Stevens turns to the active imagination, by which a universe indifferent to the human mind can be transformed into a living and delightful 'mundo' or the 'supreme fiction'. Looking through the 'fictive covering'[53] into the universe, reality assumes the appearance of an earthly paradise. However, Stevens's idea about

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[51] Bornstein, Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens 185-86.
[52] Kermode 37.
[53] Kermode 24. See pp.137-38 of this Chapter where I quote Kermode's argument about the 'supreme fiction'.

the earthly paradise includes the ugly as well as the beautiful. For example, in 'Cy Est Pourtraicte, Madame Ste Ursule, et Les Unze Mille Vierges' (1915) Stevens produces an allegorical picture which shows Ursule, the incarnation of the rich and sensuous imagery of earth, dedicating a bouquet of the beauty on the earth as an offering to the Lord. Buttel indicates how 'the theme – the union of earth and heaven on earth – is incorporated symbolically through the ritual of Ursula, the reaction of the very human Lord, and the offering itself'[54].

Ursula, in a garden, found
A bed of radishes.
She kneeled upon the ground
And gathered them,
With flowers around,
Blue, gold, pink, and green.

She dressed in red and gold brocade
And in the grass an offering made
Of radishes and flowers. (*CP*, 21)

The paradisiacal image of the earth is portrayed by Ursula with an odd bouquet of radishes and flowers. The combination of radishes and flowers gives us the impression of an unsophisticated offering to the Lord; however, He is thrilled with joy at the freshness in the combination when He 'in His garden sought / New leaf and shadowy tinct'. Stevens, quoting Marianne Moore's phrase, 'imaginary gardens with real toads in them', praises what she achieves as the genuine Romantic: 'The very conjunction of imaginary gardens and real toads is one more specimen of the romantic of Miss Moore. Above all things she demands "the raw material of poetry in all its rawness." She demands the romantic that is genuine, that is living, the enriching, poetic reality.'[55] Buttel, who quotes this, says, 'This is what Stevens was demanding by the conjunction of radishes and flowers'.[56] The

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[54] Buttel 244.
[55] Stevens, 'A Poet that Matters' in Opus Posthumous 221.
[56] Buttel 244.

imagination must adhere to reality. The acceptance of the whole reality could be witnessed in 'The Comedian as the Letter C' when Crispin inhaled 'all the arrant stinks / That helped him round his rude aesthetic out' (*CP*, 36). The acceptance of unfavourable things which are at odds with desirable aesthetics is condensed in Ursula's bouquet. A similar effect that Stevens contrives by including within his poems odd things like toads, legendary for their ugliness, is achieved by the introduction here of radishes alongside the flowers. The poet's willingness to appreciate the whole of reality can be found in his embracement of the world as his beloved woman. And we can also again associate the Lord with the male imagination which embraces female reality lovingly. The American song created on 'the earth, / Seen as inamorata' ('An Ordinary Evening in New Haven', *CP*, 484) forms the foundation of Stevens's poetry. However, it is also true that this positive view of life is always haunted by his sombre sense of human mortality.

In 'Sunday Morning', through 'a woman's meditation on religion and the meaning of life'[57] the poet's subtle personal belief is revealed. The title is an integral part of the poem, dominating the meaning of the poem. On Sunday morning the woman deliberately does not go to church and chooses to enjoy her luxurious breakfast to her heart's content. Her breakfast table is full of sensuous well-being.

> Complacencies of the peignoir, and late
> Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,
> And the green freedom of a cockatoo
> Upon a rug mingle to dissipate
> The holy hush of ancient sacrifice. (*CP*, 66-67)

The woman, surrendering to the sunlight in her comfortable peignoir, celebrates the splendid opulence of her surroundings. The setting of her breakfast table is described as though it were a painting which consists of appealing objects. However, the joy of earthly pleasure is eclipsed by the thought of past belief: 'she

[57] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 250.

feels the dark / Encroachment of that old catastrophe, / As a calm darkens among water-lights' (*CP*, 67). The lively atmosphere of the earthly paradise is contrasted with the elegiac thought of Christian faith. The dead belief is emphasised by its silence 'without sound'. And the hissing sibilants in 'the holy hush of ancient sacrifice' also give the sound effect for silence. The arrangement of each object shows her concrete reality, into which she immerses herself and from which in her reverie she passes across the 'wide water' (*CP*, 67) of time and space to Palestine and the day of the Crucifixion.

The meditative journey makes her wonder whether the Christian faith as a relic of imagination can promise the same paradise as she is in now. Owing to the loss of Christian assurance, she must have recourse to a divine moment when strong emotion is aroused by the exquisite interplay of nature. This is the basis of an affirmation:

> Divinity must live within herself:
> Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;
> Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued
> Elations when the forest blooms; gusty
> Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights;
> All pleasures and all pains, remembering
> The bough of summer and the winter branch.
> These are the measures destined for her soul. (*CP*, 67)

Rehder says,

> She wants a secular religion based in transitory things, 'comforts of the sun' and moods. She desires the emotion of religion without the theology, and in the poem the negation of religion produces a freeing and proliferation of feeling of all kinds: passions, moods, grievings, elations, emotions. There is a need to feel deeply and variously, and for feeling to be measured.[58]

In place of the dogmatic structure of religion, what is elated in human feeling is

[58] Rehder 69.

valued to satisfy the spiritual need. Stevens, like Wordsworth, proclaims the importance of emotional experience. Furthermore the rhetorical question, with which the second stanza opens, emphasises the superiority of the earthly paradise over the heavenly paradise for the Christian faith. We can 'find in comforts of the sun, / In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else / In any balm or beauty of the earth, / Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven' (*CP*, 67). Abrams, indicating the Wordsworthian meditation in 'Sunday Morning', says,

> . . . we recognize something approximating the high argument of the Romantic poet (while "Beauty – a living Presence of the earth" waited upon his steps) proclaimed the power of the mind of man to realize an equivalent of "Paradise, and groves / Elysian, Fortunate Fields", by the "consummation" of a union with the common earth which will require of us "nothing more than what we are".[59]

The complete acceptance of nature with a philosophical resignation which can be witnessed in 'Sunday Morning' can be said to be Wordsworth's 'wise passiveness'. In Stevens's poetic attitude there is a living and growing continuity with Romanticism. For Stevens who inherits the Worthworthian appreciation of nature, the vision of the outside world is transformed into a paradise.

> The sky will be much friendlier then than now,
> A part of labor and a part of pain,
> And next in glory to enduring love,
> Not this dividing and indifferent blue. (*CP*, 68)

By appreciating earth as a paradise, we come to see that the sky does not exist any more as the boundary between earth and heaven but as a part of our physical world. Both of these poets of human stoicism have, in Beckett's words, a 'sense of nature as a source of moral strength'. And this sense is 'produced from the struggle to find significance in a world where nothing could be relied upon apart from the mind in conjunction with reality'.[60] In this one world the severance

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[59] Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism 70. The quoted lines and words in the quotation are from Wordsworth's The Recluse.
[60] Beckett 18.

between the imagination and reality can be healed and a reconciliation is achieved.

This positive view of life cannot be sustained at the thought of life's uncertainty. The woman says,

> . . . "I am content when wakened birds,
> Before they fly, test the reality
> Of misty fields, by their sweet questionings;
> But when the birds are gone, and their warm fields
> Return no more, where, then, is paradise?" (*CP*, 68)

Stevens's 'sweet questionings' echo Wordsworth's 'obstinate questionings' about the loss of visions in his 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality'.

> . . . those obstinate questionings
> Of sense and outward things,
> Fallings from us, vanishings;
> Blank misgivings of a Creature
> Moving about in worlds not realized, (144-48)

It is as if Wordsworth tries to retrieve the loss of continual relation with nature by 'obstinate questionings'. In contrast to Wordsworth, who suffers from the epistemological problem of how to grasp external objects in his mind,[61] Stevens is

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[61] Paul D. Sheats, quoting Wordsworth's note on the lines from 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality':

> I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality.

and Wordsworth's words which can be considered to be related to the lines:

> There was a time in my life when I had to push against something that resisted, to be sure that there was anything outside me. I was sure of my own mind; everything else fell away, and vanished into thought.

argues,

> All accounts focus on the ninth stanza of the Ode, and the remembered "fallings from us, vanishings". . . . Modern readers have regarded this experience as evidence of extreme subjectivism, or a first version of a "visionary" experience, . . . The agency of vision ceased, in other words, to convey the "outness" of its objects, and visible images paradoxically blinded the mind to whatever lies beyond the self. Judging from the metaphors of "falling" and "vanishing", which suggest both vertigo and sensory deprivation, what lay beyond these subjective images would seem to be a

content with what it is even if it is the 'reality / Of misty fields' and can accept life as it is without questioning its meaning and might stop grasping what the absolute is. The passive acceptance reminds us of Keats's 'Negative Capability', 'that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason'.

However, despite this philosophical acceptance, Stevens wavers before the idea of death. In the earthly paradise, owing to its transitoriness, death is unavoidable. Therefore, the woman says, 'But in contentment I still feel / The need of some imperishable bliss' (*CP*, 68). Against this complaint, the poet shows his self-controlled view: 'Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her, / Alone, shall come fulfilment to our dreams / And our desires' (*CP*, 68-69). Furthermore he exemplifies this statement by showing negative as well as positive aspects in life.

> . . . Although she strews the leaves
> Of sure obliteration on our paths,
> The path sick sorrow took, the many paths
> Where triumph rang its brassy phrase, or love
> Whispered a little out of tenderness,
> She makes the willow shiver in the sun
> For maidens who were wont to sit and gaze
> Upon the grass, relinquished to their feet.
> She causes boys to pile new plums and pears
> On disregarded plate. The maidens taste
> And stray impassioned in the littering leaves. (*CP*, 69)

It is true that, though life is transient, we have joyous moments by which we can come to terms with life. The momentary beauty in nature represented by the willow shivering in the sun can be compared to the beauty of heavenly paradise, which was sought by the woman. The woman troubled with the uncertainty of

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void, an "abyss".
Paul D. Sheats, The Making of Wordsworth's Poetry, 1785-1798 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1973) 17. The quoted passages are from The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth vol. 4, 463-67.

mutable nature still wonders what the heavenly paradise is like.

The descriptions of the heavenly paradise without change or death in the sixth stanza remind us of Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', in which he could not whole-heartedly appreciate the eternal beauty of the urn.

> Is there no change of death in paradise?
> Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs
> Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,
> Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,
> With rivers like our own that seek for seas
> They never find, the same receding shores
> That never touch with inarticulate pang?
> Why set the pear upon those river-banks
> Or spice the shores with odors of the plum?
> Alas, that they should wear our colors there,
> The silken weavings of our afternoons,
> And pick the strings of our insipid lutes!
> Death is the mother of beauty, mystical,
> Within whose burning bosom we devise
> Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly. (*CP*, 69)

Gareth Reeves argues that 'this music is only Keats-*like*, for the diction and expression stand at a cerebral distance from Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn".' According to Reeves, Keats '*enacts* the pang: "Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss, / Though winning near the goal . . ."(17-18)', while Stevens observes 'the "inarticulate pang" in a slightly world-weary "sameness" of phrasing ("rivers like our own that seek for seas / They never find, the same receding shores / That never touch")'. Reeves prompts us to notice that Stevens expresses his sense of the value of Keats's ode, not by enacting but by observing Romantic anxiety. Stevens's stance as a modern poet is apparent in his refusal to follow the Romantic practice of directly expressing strong emotion. Stevens's success in emotionally detaching himself from his subject reflects his derisive attitude towards the cold pastoral of

the eternal world. The audible irony can be heard in the alliterations 'hang / heavy' and 'perfect / perishing' as well as the music played by the denizens of the imagined paradise who 'pick the strings of our insipid lutes!'.[62] The detached observation of the eternal paradise shows Stevens's preference for a mortal paradise. The affirmation of life condensed in the repeated sentence, 'Death is the mother of beauty' shows Stevens's philosophical understanding of life as well as his appreciation of the beauty of evanescent life.

Reeves suggests that 'while Stevens's music richly registers the burning inarticulate pangs of human desire, the burning bosom, it at the same time steps back to acknowledge that our attempts to accommodate them, even to make a theology out of them, are a devising, a human fictiveness.'[63] The 'burning bosom' can be regarded as the figure for life, which reminds us of the consumption of creative energy described as a strong power of life in Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life'. In the inevitable exhaustion of life energy we have to 'devise' fictions which celebrate the contact between the imagination and reality. In the earthly paradise where all lives are consumed by the fire of life within her burning bosom and where 'Death' becomes 'the mother of beauty' there is a reversal of the order where art is desired to be eternal in contrast to the world's ephemeral beauty. A fiction created on the basis of the art valued in transience promises the 'imperishable bliss' and the poetic experience in it gives us a 'mystical' moment, which satisfies the need for belief. To understand how poetry relates to life as a substitute for religion, it may be useful to look more closely at some features of the subject.

The poet repeatedly reveals to us which paradise is genuine and can be a substitute for religion as if by doing so, he tries to convince himself to accept this as essential. The earthly paradise does not promise eternal beauty but reveals the transient and random nature of existence.

> They shall know well the heavenly fellowship
> Of men that perish and of summer morn.

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[62] Gareth Reeves, 'The Inward Keats: Bloom, Vendler, Stevens' in Keats: Bicentenary Readings, ed. Michael O'Neill (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1997) 96-97.
[63] Reeves 97.

And whence they came and whither they shall go
The dew upon their feet shall manifest. (*CP*, 70)

Stevens comments on these lines thus: 'Life is as fugitive as dew upon the feet of men dancing in dew. Men do not either come from any direction or disappear in any direction. Life is as meaningless as dew'.[64] Life is as fugitive and meaningless as dew since we have no such heavenly paradise as proposed to us by the Christian faith. We just die as life stops. This subject matter is again taken up in 'The Death of a Soldier' (1918).

Life contracts and death is expected,
As in a season of autumn.
The soldier falls.

He does not become a three-days personage,
Imposing his separation,
Calling for pomp.

Death is absolute and without memorial,
As in a season of autumn,
When the wind stops,

When the wind stops and, over the heavens,
The clouds go, nevertheless,
In their direction. (*CP*, 97)

There is no supernatural event like the Resurrection; we are subject to death as 'absolute' and final. And its absoluteness is highlighted against the background of the permanent existence of nature: 'When the wind stops and, over the heavens, / The clouds go, nevertheless, / In their direction'. We wonder whether such a view can save us. However, it is poetry that gives fresh significance to life. In Gelpi's

[64] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 250.

words, Stevens presents a paradise 'regained not by divine intervention but by the transformative power of the human imagination over a fallen world'.[65]

Though all living things are destined to die and seem to be 'as meaningless as dew', in life's brevity we can find a transient beauty. Committing ourselves to mutability we experience every passing moment to its full, accentuating our ability to appreciate the beauty of decay. In other words, without mutability we cannot appreciate transient beauty. This acknowledgement leads to the reconciliation between the realities of life and the imagination. And we can say that Stevens regards poetry created through the reconciliation as providing spiritual salvation. Because the acknowledgement of the reconciliation reflects on poetry, realising his statement: 'After one has abandoned a belief in god, poetry is that essence which takes its place as life's redemption'.[66] We noted a little earlier that Stevens was strongly influenced by Santayana, who explains the function of poetry as follows: 'This higher plane is the sphere of significant imagination, of relevant fiction, of idealism become the interpretation of the reality it leaves behind. Poetry raised to its highest power is then identical with religion grasped in its inmost truth.'[67] Stevens inherits the idea of secular theodicy from the Romantics as well as from Santayana and believes in the power of imagination by which the problem of the dualism between the imagination and reality can be resolved. Stevens, as we have seen, believing in poetry as a substitute for religion, apotheosises the poetic imagination. And 'Sunday Morning' can be said to be the declaration of his belief. The poet, who finds value in transitoriness, immerses himself in the earthly paradise through the woman's meditation. Submission to the process of nature involves a common-sense acceptance of the inevitable that leads to acknowledgement of things as they are. By substantiating this philosophical understanding into poetry, to which he turns incessantly, Stevens can obtain 'life's redemption'.

This appreciation of the natural world reminds us of Keats's autumn ode.

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[65] Gelpi 53.
[66] Stevens, 'Adagia' in Opus Posthumous 185.
[67] Santayana 172.

Vendler says,

> Keats' ode had penetrated Stevens' consciousness and imagination absolutely and was already provoking him to see the world in its light, even if he found the world insufficient without attendant metaphysics. Keats' ode continued to provide Stevens with material to the very end of his life.[68]

Vendler's opinion agrees with mine, except for her argument that Stevens found Keats's world insufficient since it has no metaphysics. It is because the ode is without metaphysics that it continues to be a guiding principle of Stevens's life. It was observed in the previous chapter that Keats's aesthetics which lies in transient beauty cannot be explored beyond the limitations of time and space of the earth. We should remember, as Vendler points out, that in the last stanza of the ode the poet's vision of the field and the sky is restricted to three-dimensional space. Stevens rewrites the ending of the ode as follows:

> We live in an old chaos of the sun,
> Or old dependency of day and night,
> Or island solitude, unsponsored, free,
> Of that wide water, inescapable.
> Deer walk upon our mountains, and the quail
> Whistle about us their spontaneous cries;
> Sweet berries ripen in the wilderness;
> And, in the isolation of the sky,
> At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make
> Ambiguous undulations as they sink,
> Downward to darkness, on extended wings. (*CP*, 70)

The interplay between the two adjectives, 'free' and 'inescapable' suggests that the life we live consists of paradox and irony. Though spiritually we are 'unsponsored, free' in that we have no god who supports and controls our island, physically we

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[68] Vendler, 'Stevens and Keats' "To Autumn"' in Wallace Stevens: A Celebration 176.

are not free from the 'inescapable' or isolated island, beyond which there is nowhere else to go since there is nothing across the 'wide water'. The poet lost in his 'meditation on religion and the meaning of life'[69] celebrates the physical world without any metaphysical sense.

The celebration of the physical world is sung in an American music which consists of 'spontaneous' and 'casual' sounds of nature. 'The closing of "Sunday Morning", as suggested by Vendler, is 'a rewritten version of the close of Keats' ode'. The reality which surrounds Stevens is the American wilderness in contrast with Keats's domestic scenery in England. According to her, Keats's cottage is transmuted to an American cabin, cornfields become American hayfields. The descriptions of non-human life also show the difference between the English and the American: gnats, lambs, crickets, redbreast and swallows in Keats; deer, quail and pigeons in Stevens[70]. By choosing poetic materials from everyday life in America, Stevens's literary mode assumes characteristics which are suitable for his new Romanticism. Vendler says,

> None of our modern poets, except for Eliot, is more European in cultural possession than Stevens (he had none of Pound's need to assume an aggressively American public manner); but in spite of his ease with European thought and taste, Stevens is resolutely American in his poetics. As he grew older, his investigations of both modern consciousness and American poetics deepened and broadened, embodying themselves in memorable poems of what it is to live in a world without gods, and what it is to be a poet writing in America.[71]

Stevens's 'ease with European thought and taste' is reflected in his frequent use of French words. However, to invent a truly native American poetry, it is necessary for Stevens to accommodate his passion for European aestheticism and assert that 'all poetry must be native to its region' as we witnessed in 'Anecdote of Men by the

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[69] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 250.
[70] Vendler, 'Stevens and Keats' "To Autumn"' in Wallace Stevens: A Celebration 173-74.
[71] Vendler, Voices & Visions 125-26.

Thousand' and 'The Comedian as the Letter C'.[72]

To overcome the mortality of man Stevens values a Keats-like response to nature. As I said earlier, Stevens concludes the poem with a scene of birds in flight that recalls Keats's swallows fading away into the sky in 'To Autumn'. Both of the endings depict the reflection of the poet's mind in the philosophical understanding of life which is elevated to a personal religious experience. Stevens demonstrates the commitment of art to this response. Gray argues,

> In this final stanza, the poet at once celebrates the contact between reality and the imagination; and offers us one more example of the kind of imaginative 'mundo' which can grow out of this contact. As in the opening lines of the poem he so selects from the raw material of experience, and rearranges, as to create his own special vision of an earthly paradise.[73]

Stevens's imaginative mundo is created by abstracting and rearranging the raw materials for the poetry of earth. And the subject of the imaginative mundo is the celebration of the contact between the imagination and reality. Though the downward motions of the 'casual flocks of pigeons' are 'ambiguous undulations', the birds suspended in serene assurance between the inaccessible heaven and the earth shows a complete acceptance of the natural world. To quote from Gray again,

> The pigeons, avatars of all the other birds which have appeared in the poem, move downward to darkness and death. They cannot help doing that. But even as they go, they seem to weave elaborate patterns in the sky, which give a certain fleeting shapeliness to their fall. . . . Like all men, they belong to one particular world of crisis and change: and yet they can still discover in that world the elements which, rearranged, will give their lives a provisional form and meaning.[74]

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[72] Vendler, Voices & Visions 133. As for Stevens's American poetics, see Chapter 3, 126-27.

[73] Gray 165.

[74] Gray 165. Vendler also suggests the same interpretation as Gray.

> In the end, as the pigeons inscribe their transient motions in the air, their calligraphy is read as elusively ambiguous by the poet seeking significance, and doctrinal choice dissolves in mystery. But while metaphysical certainty remains

The downward motion of the birds seems to picture a transient pattern in the evening sky. However, when the imaginative conception of reality produces a sense of recognition of the conjunction of themselves and the world, it will 'give their lives a provisional form and meaning'.

We should also recall that the eyes following the figure of the flight in 'To Autumn' and 'Sunday Morning' are the same ones in the final stanza of 'Le Monocle de Mon Oncle'. Stevens as well as Keats finds solace in the tranquil scene of the evening and transfers the calm acceptance of mutable nature into poetry. Their attitude towards the law of life is to accept mortality as an essential part of human nature. The acknowledgement of things as they are is for both the poets the sublime end of art. As Vendler demonstrates, we, the readers, are absorbed into the flow of the autumn ode which moves between poet and season[75]. In Rehder's words, 'Half-meanings are half-truths – literature, the fictions that complete reality'.[76] With the acknowledgement of the difficulty of describing poetic truth, Stevens seeks the possibility in 'literature, the fictions that complete reality'. We can suggest though poetry is an autonomous and self-sufficient being, as Stevens assumes that 'Poetry is the expression of the experience of poetry',[77] it deals in some sense with truth and conveys it through our experience in the poem. And this belief sustains him in his work. It can be said that we can have the same experience in 'Sunday Morning', appreciating the poet's aesthetics as well as poetics which lead us to understand 'The theory of poetry is the theory of life'.[78] The aesthetic absolute for Stevens is realised in the work itself, creating a supreme fiction.

Stevens's repeated use of celebrating words such as 'festival', 'hymn' and

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> unattainable, the truth of existence is clear. . . . In such an ending, *be* is final of *seem*, and death is the only certainty uninvaded by metaphysical doubt. . . . Stevens . . . makes his landscape depend for its significance on what it can explicitly suggest about the truth of the human condition.

Vendler, 'Stevens and Keats' "To Autumn"' in Wallace Stevens: A Celebration 174.

[75] Vendler, The Odes of John Keats 246.

[76] Rehder 81.

[77] Stevens, 'Adagia' in Opus Posthumous 190.

[78] Stevens, 'Adagia' in Opus Posthumous 202.

'chorale' shows the image of the union of men with the world. The words which describe the image become one aspect of 'the gaiety of language'[79] which is exhibited in Harmonium. However, we should remember that Stevens says in a later letter of 29 May 1952:

> . . . the angel is the angel of reality. This is clear only if the reader is of the idea that we live in a world of the imagination, in which reality and contact with it are the great blessings. For nine readers out of ten, the necessary angel will appear to be the angel of the imagination and for nine days out of ten that is true, although it is the tenth day that counts.[80]

Towards the end of his life Stevens tends to concede the validity of reality and in the letter of 29 November 1954 declares, 'The Necessary Angel is not the imagination but reality'.[81] In Harmonium Stevens depicts negative aspects of the imagination while he also shows an affirmative view of it. It is true that the imagination is celebrated in Harmonium. Confidence in the imagination can be heard in 'Tea at the Palaz of Hoon'. Successful reconciliation is realised in 'Life in Motion' and 'Sunday Morning'. While a celebratory mood is seen in some poems, the poet's consciousness of the intricate fluctuations between the imagination and reality invites only an uncertain assurance. We must not overlook the darker side of the imagination. In 'Le Monocle de Mon Oncle' Stevens adopts a strategy of self-mockery to protect himself against the lack of confidence in the imagination and reveals his struggle to create his new Romanticism. The loss of confidence in the imagination against the darker side of reality also emerges through the bold and mocking tone in 'The Emperor of Ice-Cream' and 'A High-Toned Old Christian Woman'. The more the poet adheres to reality, the more the 'reality-imagination complex' seems to lose the tense relationship, allowing reality to usurp the imagination. The oscillating state of the volume suggests the productive irresolutions shaped by Stevens's 'reality-imagination complex'.

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[79] 'The gaiety of language is our seigneur' in 'Esthétique du Mal' (*CP*, 322). Also see 'Poetry is the gaiety (joy) of language' in 'Adagia' in Opus Posthumous 199.
[80] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 753.
[81] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 852.

Stevens himself recognises the defeat of the imagination against the pressure of reality. Kermode comments that 'The Man Whose Pharynx Was Bad' (1921) is 'Stevens's "Dejection Ode", a poem of intense feeling about the incapacity to feel even the greatest forces, to exert any imaginative pressure on reality'.[82] The loss of vitality in the imagination, struggling against the pressure of reality, shows the negative aspect of the imagination.

> The time of year has grown indifferent.
> Mildew of summer and the deepening snow
> Are both alike in the routine I know.
> I am too dumbly in my being pent. (*CP*, 96)

If we apply the cyclical nature of the creative imagination to the two seasons mentioned in the first stanza, summer shows a luxuriant wealth of the imagination and in winter the imagination is deprived of all fictions, being reduced to unadorned reality. The problem lies in that the poet cannot have recourse to the summer nor the winter imaginations. The summer imagination, which must be productive, is mildewed and the winter imagination makes the situation more serious since the 'deepening snow' makes it difficult for the poet to reach the bare reality. The poet cannot participate in the cyclical change of the imagination. Neither season is of use to him; they are 'both alike in the routine I know'. The cause of dejection can be found in the indifference of the poet to poetic activity. This is emphasised by declaring, 'I am too dumbly in my being pent'.

In the second stanza the poet expects poetic inspiration as Shelley does in 'Ode to the West Wind'.

> The wind attendant on the solstices
> Blows on the shutters of the metropoles,
> Stirring no poet in his sleep, and tolls
> The grand ideas of the villages. (*CP*, 96)

But the poet falling into a deep sleep of the imagination cannot catch the

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[82] Kermode 36.

inspiration by which he could carry out poetic activities at the summer or winter solstice in the cycle of the creative imagination. Thus owing to the absence of the creative imagination, reality is not transformed into fiction; it and the poet fall into 'the malady of the quotidian'. To escape this 'malady of the quotidian' Stevens turns towards the winter imagination. Indeed, he later cancelled the lines about the summer imagination included when the poem was first published.

> Perhaps if summer ever came to rest
> And lengthened, deepened, comforted, caressed
> Through days like oceans in obsidian
>
> Horizons, full of night's midsummer blaze;

O'Neill comments on the cancellation of these lines, 'The erasure of these lines weakens the poem. The rhyme scheme is unusefully fractured; and the enriching departure from the poem's overall mood and allowance into it of a need to be "comforted, caressed" have gone'.[83] This may be the case, but at the risk of breaking the balance of the poem, Stevens cancelled the lines to highlight the winter imagination which he tries to rescue.

> Perhaps, if winter once could penetrate
> Through all its purples to the final slate,
> Persisting bleakly in an icy haze,
>
> One might in turn become less diffident,
> Out of such mildew plucking neater mould
> And spouting new orations of the cold.
> One might. One might. But time will not relent. (*CP*, 96)

The poet, who knows the serious state of his dejection, explores the possibility of the act of decreation for the new cycle of the imagination. It is necessary for him to reset the imaginative activity to reach a bare reality purged clean of all the

[83] O'Neill, Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem 246.

accretions brought by the human mind: 'if winter once could penetrate / Through all its purples to the final slate'. The process of decreation seems to be almost successful since the first person 'I' is reduced to the impersonal pronoun 'one', erasing the ego as we witnessed in 'The Snow Man'. However, he cannot restore the loss of confidence. The possibility seems to be confirmed in the repeated use of 'One might', while the loss of confidence is simply enhanced every time the phrase is repeated, revealing owing to the uncertainty of the restoration, that the poet's hope operates solely on a verbal level. The poem concludes with the negative answer, 'But time will not relent', as if confirming that his bad pharynx is too chronic to be cured.

In the latter part of 'Anatomy of Monotony' composed after 'The Man Whose Pharynx Was Bad', the overwhelming pressure of reality is again enhanced.

> The body walks forth naked in the sun
> And, out of tenderness or grief, the sun
> Gives comfort, so that other bodies come,
> Twinning our phantasy and our device,
> And apt in versatile motion, touch and sound
> To make the body covetous in desire
> Of the still finer, more implacable chords.
> So be it. Yet the spaciousness and light
> In which the body walks and is deceived,
> Falls from that fatal and that barer sky,
> And this the spirit sees and is aggrieved. (*CP*, 108)

Barbara M. Fisher comments that the man who is stripped of illusion and his gods and nakedly alone under the sun or the fact shows the vulnerability of modern man yearning for something beyond the 'bare spaces of our skies' (*CP*, 108).[84] Under the white light of the common day he cannot imagine a fictive covering for reality. Though he invents the fictive covering, it cannot satisfy his desire for 'still

[84] Barbara M. Fisher, Wallace Stevens: The Intensest Rendezvous (Charlottesville and London: U P of Virginia, 1990) 41.

finer, more implacable chords'. The reality is too 'light' and 'bare' for the imagination to work on it. Riddel says that the poem is about disillusionment in that man is 'born of nature and left "naked in the sun", condemned to grow old in the monotony of unrequited want'[85].

While he declares, 'The imagination is one of the great human powers',[86] Stevens steps back from this statement and says, 'The Necessary Angel is not the imagination but reality'. Stevens vacillates between imagination and reality. This vacillation underpins his linguistic gaiety, which turns into the imagination's embellishments of reality and distorts reality as the Romantic imagination does. It is relevant to quote here Gelpi's reference to Robert Frost's criticism of Stevens. According to Frost, 'Stevens' retreat into verbal artifice makes his verse, however glittering and tinselly, detached from reality and so useless except for decorative purposes'. Though Gelpi asserts that Frost's criticism 'springs from the ingrained Puritan suspicion of art as a lie'[87], in a sense we can say Frost notes Stevens's concern for the validity of the imagination.

A Keats-like aesthetics that values transient beauty lives on in Stevens's poetry. The imagination which succeeds in reconciling itself with the transient life provides a spiritual remedy since the reconciliation means accepting negative aspects of life. As we have seen, Stevens thinks that 'in the absence of a belief in God, the mind turns to its own creations'. The fiction created through the affirmative view of life works as a substitute for religion. The Romantics as well as Stevens, by apotheosising the poetic imagination, regard poetry as a means of 'life's redemption'; however, the field of poetic activity is quite different. Though Stevens shares with the Romantics a belief in the power of the imagination to synthesise external reality, he denies the ultimate being in some transcendent realm. Against the Romantics who hankered for the unity of individual vision, Stevens seeks the unity in the artwork itself.

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[85] Riddel 71.
[86] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 138.
[87] Gelpi 49.

Exploring a new Romanticism, a literary mode suitable for Modernism, Stevens's creative activity progresses towards the supreme fiction on the premise that what is imagined turns into the mind's own reality. What makes Stevens different from the Romantics is that he values the fiction created out of the interaction between imagination and reality. It is difficult to realise a new Romanticism in the balanced state of the imagination and reality. If it is realised successfully, it becomes momentary. Indeed, such reconciliation must be momentary since it must be subject to the constantly changing world. And even the vital imagination cannot keep up with the constantly changing world. Therefore Stevens's new Romanticism must be realised through an energetic battle between the imagination and reality. On 17 March 1937 Stevens writes,

> During the winter I have written something like 35 or 40 short pieces, of which about 25 seem to be coming through. They deal with the relation or balance between imagined things and real things which, as you know, is a constant source of trouble to me. I don't feel that I have as yet got to the end of the subject.[88]

Stevens's new Romanticism cannot easily be defined without reference to various aspects of the 'reality-imagination complex'. To concretise the new Romanticism as American poetry, Stevens has recourse to what is unpretentious and closely related to everyday life, yet possesses 'something of the essential gaudiness of poetry'. The euphuistic gaudiness of language which distinguishes Harmonium is later much restrained in favour of meditative subtlety. After Harmonium Stevens's thought about poetry gradually progresses; it will culminate in 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction'.

[88] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 316.

Chapter 5: Towards a Supreme Fiction

The celebratory tone which permeates Harmonium is gradually subdued as Stevens progresses to the next phase which assumes an increasing meditative weight. After Harmonium it took twelve years for Stevens to publish his next book, Ideas of Order (1935). After Ideas of Order he published continuously, The Man with the Blue Guitar (1937), Parts of a World (1942) and Transport to Summer (1947). These books can be said to be the crystallisation of the poet's central theme into words. Above all, 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction' (1942) in Transport to Summer is a work in which Stevens's thought about poetry culminates and after which he begins to have a strong sense of reality as predominating over imagination. Working towards the idealised union between the imagination and reality which is gained in 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction', Stevens writes poems such as 'The Idea of Order at Key West' (1934), 'The Man with the Blue Guitar' (1937) and 'The Man on the Dump' (1938).

In Harmonium we find reality breaking in on imagination constantly. In some poems Stevens's battles to reconcile the terms are fought in imaginary worlds. For example, in such works as 'Earthy Anecdote' and 'Anecdote of the Jar', the creative act of the imagination is dramatised in a completely isolated world of anecdote. In 'The Comedian as the Letter C' the problem of the 'reality-imagination complex' is treated in an epic-like story. In other poems such as 'Peter Quince at the Clavier' and 'To the One of Fictive Music' the problem is dramatised in a fictive world. In 'Sunday Morning' Stevens comes into immediate contact with the outside; however, the meditative tone of the poem gives us a sense that the poet is engrossed in thought. Though the poem does not describe explicitly the relation between poetry and reality or how poetry relates to life, the suggestive ending shows a celebration of the physical world and a communion with nature. In 'The Idea of Order at Key West' Stevens again transfers his poetic space from the fictive world to the outside world and demonstrates how poetry relates to life, allowing us to experience its significance.

As we observed in the preceding chapter, the subject of how poetry relates to life was repeatedly taken up by Stevens. In 'The Idea of Order at Key West' Stevens practises a theory of poetry which becomes his theory of life. In a sceptical age no established religion or philosophy can ever provide the definite means by which we can reach the ultimate truth. Beckett describes 'the condition of modern man' by quoting the word 'poverty' used often by Stevens.

> The word 'poverty' was a favourite of Stevens's. He used it . . . to evoke the condition of modern man, without certainty, without truths acceptable as authoritative, without anything but himself and his planet to make something of that (sic) will satisfy his need for belief and for significance. All Stevens's work should be seen against the background of this 'poverty' because it was towards the making of something out of and for it that his whole effort was directed.[1]

The problem of our bereft state is what Stevens called 'poverty', which is already treated in 'Sunday Morning' when he says, "We live in an . . . island solitude, unsponsored' (*CP*, 70). In Vendler's words again, 'death is the only certainty uninvaded by metaphysical doubt'.[2] This acknowledgement casts a dark shadow on Stevens's view of life. Stevens, conscious of the world of poverty, feels himself entrusted with a mission to realise the use of poetry as 'life's redemption'. We might also remember what he said in his letter, 'the idea of pure poetry, essential imagination, as the highest objective of the poet, appears to be, at least potentially, as great as the idea of God'.[3] Stevens thinks the order imposed by belief in God is not relevant to the chaotic reality of the modern age. He believes that the poor condition of man can be compensated for by poetry as a fictive answer to spiritual need. In the absence of a belief in God the poet cannot have recourse to metaphysical or religious belief for his poetic thought. The reality has become the barren external world, with which imagination carries on its incessant intercourse to make out what will 'satisfy his need for belief and for significance'. He must

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[1] Beckett 21.
[2] Vendler, 'Stevens and Keats' "To Autumn"' in Wallace Stevens: A Celebration 174.
[3] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 369.

create poetry out of nothingness, so that his poetic principle lies in fiction. And the nature of this poetic activity is sketched when Stevens sympathetically quotes Ernst Cassirer's An Essay on Man in 'Imagination as Value': 'In romantic thought the theory of poetic imagination had reached its climax. Imagination is no longer that special human activity which builds up the human world of art. It now has universal metaphysical value. Poetic imagination is the only clue to reality.'[4] For the Romantic poets and Stevens share the belief that the creations of the imagination are related to living experience and offer 'the only clue to reality'. This belief in the use of poetry is dramatised in 'The Idea of Order at Key West'.

The song sung by Stevens's woman is an imaginative transformation of her surroundings or reality into a fiction. The woman singer is 'the maker' who creates a fiction. She is his muse and her song can be his poetry. Through poetry the poet can find an order in chaotic reality. Though Kermode says, 'finally it [the song] imposed its order on the whole reality'[5], the problem of imposing an order on reality is experienced in 'Anecdote of Jar' as we have examined in the previous chapter. In 'The Idea of Order at Key West', rather than imposing an order, the poet sustains an exquisite equilibrium between the imagination and reality:

> She sang beyond the genius of the sea.
> The water never formed to mind or voice,
> Like a body wholly body, fluttering
> Its empty sleeves; and yet its mimic motion
> Made constant cry, caused constantly a cry,
> That was not ours although we understood,
> Inhuman, of the veritable ocean. (*CP*, 128)

The song sung by the woman is beyond the 'genius of the sea' and the movement of the sea becomes the 'mimic motion' which sounds like the woman's song. But the equilibrium between the two is subtly controlled by 'yet' and 'although' by which the poet modifies the inferiority of the sound of the sea. The slight movement of

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[4] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 136.
[5] Kermode 57.

the syntax made by 'yet' and 'although' also creates the rhythm of the tides in the stream of the sentence, balancing the power relationship between fiction and reality. Gray comments,

> Note the extraordinary plangency of this verse. The use of alliteration, assonance, and verbal repetition is characteristically elaborate; and each line, a cunning combination of iambs and trochees, seems to roll forward and then fall back like the sea it describes. The entire poem repeats this to-and-fro movement. Words, phrases, and metaphors recur, accumulating meanings; ideas continually reappear; and slowly the poem seems to work its way into our minds, like the sea creeping insidiously up the shore.[6]

The elaborate structure of the poem which creates the movement of the wave enables us to feel the interplay of the sound of the sea and the woman's song as if they are intermingled and then separate and intermingled again, allowing us to sense the momentary harmony.

The second stanza repeats the 'to-and-fro movement'.

> The sea was not a mask. No more was she.
> The song and water were not medleyed sound
> Even if what she sang was what she heard,
> Since what she sang was uttered word by word.
> It may be that in all her phrases stirred
> The grinding water and the gasping wind;
> But it was she and not the sea we heard. (*CP*, 128-29)

Riddel argues that, despite the seeming equilibrium between singer and sea, the idea or fiction of order predominates:

> The opening two stanzas recreate the drama of *Harmonium* in the choric exchanges of animated sea and the lady's song: the one an inviolable reality, the other a separate distinct self. "The sea was not a mask. No

[6] Gray 169.

> more was she". Nor are the blending tones an imitation of one by the other – they are "not medleyed". There is the suggestion here of three realities: sea, song, and the higher synthesis of the two, another repetition of Stevens' secular trinity. The self nevertheless dominates: "But it was she and not the sea we heard".[7]

But the assonance in 'sea' and 'she' deliberately confuses us. By evoking the wavering movement between the song and the sea in the text, Stevens avoids a fixed harmony between the two and, as Gray puts it, 'Words, phrases, and metaphors recur, accumulating meanings; ideas continually reappear; and slowly the poem seems to work its way into our minds, like the sea creeping insidiously up the shore.' We are drawn into the to-and-fro movement, the interplay between fiction and reality.

The cumulative interplay between the imagination and reality gradually develops towards the dramatic climax of the poem. And the poem finally declares the superiority of the song over the natural sound. The woman's voice, which creates a fiction, makes each passing moment of the evening the acme of transience. The poet's experience is very similar to Keats's in 'Ode to a Nightingale' in that the song enriched by the imagination enables the poet to appreciate every passing moment intensely. Though Stevens's poem might give an impression of wish-fulfilment, the Romantic in a pejorative sense, we must not overlook the active working of the mind upon reality enacted in the poem, nor the meditation on the significance of the poetic experience. What makes Stevens different from Keats lies in the working of the mind upon reality. Though the quality of the experience in both poems is similar, the poetic process in each differs. Keats could not sustain the aesthetic moment, reducing it to a mere dream. Stevens orders reality out of his aesthetic experience in a world of imagination, creating a fiction.

> It was her voice that made

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[7] Riddel 118-19.

The sky acutest at its vanishing.
She measured to the hour its solitude.
She was the single artificer of the world
In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
Whatever self it had, became the self
That was her song, for she was the maker. (*CP*, 129)

The chaotic reality is here represented by the sea that 'made constant cry, caused constantly a cry, / That was not ours although we understand, / Inhuman, of the veritable ocean' (*CP*, 128). However, from it the woman can abstract the song, which transforms the chaotic sound of the veritable ocean into intelligible words and meanings. Relevant here is the poet's statement that the poet 'must be able to abstract himself and also to abstract reality, which he does by placing it in his imagination'.[8] Avoiding the direct expression of strong emotion in poetry, which Stevens criticizes as a Romantic characteristic, he abstracts and translates reality into his imaginative mundo: 'the sea, / Whatever self it had, became the self / That was her song' (*CP*, 129). And through her song the poet can see, in Gelpi's words, 'the material world for a time as more ordered, or at least more susceptible to order'.[9]

In the poem the process of creating an order is practised, exemplifying the use of poetry as 'life's redemption'. And we, the readers, are absorbed into the process:

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
And of ourselves and of our origins,
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds. (*CP*, 130)

The poet's 'blessed rage for order' shows the mind's desire to create order that

[8] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 23. It would also be helpful here to recall Stevens's statement about the failure of the imagination in Romanticism. He ascribes a failure of the imagination in Romanticism to minor wish-fulfilments owing to the inability to practise abstraction. On this subject see Chapter 1, 7-10.
[9] Gelpi 64.

arranges reality in a new and more satisfying experience than we had before. As a modern poet, who rejects metaphysical belief, Stevens cannot easily use the words of a strongly religious nature such as 'God' or 'creator'. Words such as 'maker' and 'artificer' show, rather, a poet who exercises a purely poetic activity. And furthermore by being given meaning through poetic activity, 'the meaningless plungings of water and the wind' (*CP*, 129) are transformed into an ordered world. The fictive world appears to have a spiritual dimension which Stevens represents as 'ghostlier demarcations' (*CP*, 130). Though the exquisite encounter does not last long as in Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' and the singing ends, the voice of the singer is still lingering in Stevens's ears and through the lingering note the scenery of the night assumes an order: 'The lights . . . Mastered the night and portioned out the sea, . . . Arranging, deepening, enchanting night' (*CP*, 130). The aesthetic experience is transient; however, it creates what can be called 'life's redemption' for the poet and us. The poem, exemplifying how the theory of poetry becomes the theory of life, makes a good prologue to 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction'.

After the success of ordering the sea at Key West, Stevens's poetic vision alters. The first poem of Ideas of Order, 'Farewell to Florida' (1936), written two years after 'The Idea of Order at Key West', represents the relation between imagination and reality in austere terms. The poem shows Stevens's firm resolution to confront the darker side of reality.

> Go on, high ship, since now, upon the shore,
> The snake has left its skin upon the floor.
> Key West sank downward under massive clouds
> And silvers and greens spread over the sea. The moon
> Is at the mast-head and the past is dead.
> Her mind will never speak to me again.
> I am free. (*CP*, 117)

The voyage from Florida to the North shows that the poet enters a new cycle of the creative imagination: from the period when the imagination and reality enjoy a state of mutual equilibrium to the period when the equilibrium loses its balance

because of the need to return to the mind of winter again. Therefore in the process of decreation the poet is free from the staled products of the imagination. The image of the cast-off skin of a snake suggests that the poet should cast off all accretions brought by the mind and confront reality again to begin a new poetic creativity. But, as Weston suggests, 'he [Stevens] travels not toward a pure blankness of "The Snow Man" but toward a "wintry slime"'.[10] The darker side of reality symbolised in 'Farewell to Florida' is 'the North' which is:

> . . . leafless and lies in a wintry slime
> Both of men and clouds, a slime of men in crowds.
> The men are moving as the water moves,
> This darkened water cloven by sullen swells
> Against your sides, then shoving slithering,
> The darkness shattered, turbulent with foam. (*CP*, 118)

The imagery in the last stanza indicates the very reality which Stevens must face. The iambic pentameter reinforces the plunging movement of the ship which is 'shoving' and 'slithering' towards 'the North'. Struggling through the rough voyage represents the poet's stoical attitude towards reality which is quite different from the poet's appreciation of flourishing and radiating reality in Harmonium. Thus, Stevens's 'North' forms a striking contrast to the bright and beautiful images associated with Florida. The poet-narrator leaves Florida behind in his farewell address.[11] This metaphorically shows that the poet has entered upon a new phase.

We might recall Beckett's suggestion that Stevens uses the word 'poverty' to evoke the bereft state of modern man. Kermode offers a different interpretation. According to him, the absence of imaginative happiness is what Stevens called 'poverty'.[12] He also comments, 'This poverty is the victory of reality over the

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[10] Weston 60.

[11] Cook, who agrees with A. Walton Litz's indication that 'After *Ideas of Order*, the word 'Florida' never appears again in Stevens' verse', also footnotes Litz's words, 'the word "Florida" disappears from Stevens' poetry after his ritual farewell to her in 1936' (71). According to Cook, the quotation is from A. Walton Litz, Introspective Voyager: The Poetic Development of Wallace Stevens (New York: OUP, 1972) 201.

[12] Kermode 39.

imagination; or, the failure of the *fonction fabulatrice*. It is a failure of art, in face of new and terrible pressures, to provide what the gods and myths and statues of the past did provide.'[13] Kermode's argument is persuasive, considering the weight that Stevens gives to the importance of fiction. The darker side of reality creates an oppressive power over the imagination.

> To be free again, to return to the violent mind
> That is their mind, these men, and that will bind
> Me round, carry me, misty deck, carry me
> To the cold, go on, high ship, go on, plunge on. (*CP*, 118)

In the poem, the word 'poverty' is not used; however, the society surrounding him is represented as a turbulent image of chaotic reality which rejects any compromise with imagination: 'The darkness shattered, turbulent with foam'. The repetition of an imperative form in the last line, 'carry me / To the cold, go on, high ship, go on, plunge on', shows his elated spirit responding to the world of poverty: he cannot retreat; he must move forward against reality for a new creation. In Riddel's words, 'It is a step from an individual to a social conscience, from the world of vivid sensuousness to the society of these men, whose needs "will bind / Me round"'.[14] Stevens's resolution 'to return to the violent mind' shows his readiness to confront the terrible pressures of reality, pressures which make difficult a fruitful union between imagination and reality. After a momentary harmonization of imagination with reality in 'The Idea of Order at Key West' the poem predicts a heroic battle against the overwhelming power of reality.

Owing to the transference of the poetic space to the darker and more severe reality, in 'The Man with the Blue Guitar' the savage imagination is required to confront a harsh reality. In the poem, Stevens talks of art to an audience with a strong social conscience. Though the music of the blue guitar consists of the single voice of the performer, it sounds polyphonic, producing various notes according to the performer's feelings. The performance by the guitarist and the audience's

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[13] Kermode 65.
[14] Riddel 112-13.

response to it turns into a dialogue between the two. Through the dialogue it is revealed that reality transformed by the imagination assumes a difference from 'things as they are' (*CP*, 165).

> The man bent over his guitar,
> A shearsman of sorts. The day was green.
>
> They said, "You have a blue guitar,
> You do not play things as they are".
>
> The man replied, "Things as they are
> Are changed upon the blue guitar".
>
> And they said then, "But play, you must,
> A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,
>
> A tune upon the blue guitar
> Of things exactly as they are". (*CP*, 165)

The audience objects to the performance since the guitarist does not reproduce reality as it is. According to Stevens's poetic principle that the adherence of the imagination to reality is fundamental, the music played by the guitar must be 'things exactly as they are'. However, music as the product of the imagination cannot verge on what is real. Gray points out 'how the rhyming of "guitar" and "are" emphasises the opposition between them: on the one hand, the demands of the imagination and, on the other, the exigencies of fact.[15] In the year in which he composed 'The Man with the Blue Guitar', Stevens writes about some poems in which this poem is included.

> They deal with the relation or balance between imagined things and real things which, as you know, is a constant source of trouble to me. . . . Perhaps it would be better to say that what they really deal with is the

[15] Gray 171.

> painter's problem of realization: I have been trying to see the world about me both as I see it and as it is. This means seeing the world as an imaginative man sees it.[16]

Quoting these words, Rehder comments,

> 'Realization' in every sense is Stevens' aim. For him the poem is where doubt is brought to a successful (artistic) conclusion. Both a creation of mind and an object in the world, and composed of signs marked by contact, at some stage, with reality, the poem is itself the sign of the reality-imagination complex.[17]

The problem of the 'reality-imagination complex' concerns the problem of realisation. Poetry cannot reproduce exactly things as they are. The reality reproduced by poetry is different from the world as it is. The problem of realisation displays the same theme as we find in 'To the One of Fictive Music', and yet there is a difference between the two poems. In 'To the One of Fictive Music' what the poet seizes by the imagination cannot be put into words since it is beyond words, beyond images. In 'The Man with the Blue Guitar' Stevens gives an optimistic solution to this epistemological problem by achieving a reconciliation between the imagination and reality.

The poem consists of the poet's positive and negative views of poetry, suggesting he is vacillating between the two. From the dialogue between the guitarist and the audience, the poem begins, and through some notes of discord develops into a duet between imagination and reality. For example, the strife between the two terms produces a discord.

> Ah, but to play man number one,
> To drive the dagger in his heart,

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[16] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 316. In the same letter, just before the quoted lines, Stevens mentions, 'During the winter I have written something like 35 or 40 short pieces, of which about 25 seem to be coming through'. According to the footnote for this sentence, 25 short pieces are 'Parts of "The Man with the Blue Guitar"'.

[17] Rehder 151.

To lay his brain upon the board
And pick the acrid colors out,

To nail his thought across the door,
Its wings spread wide to rain and snow,

To strike his living hi and ho,
To tick it, tock it, turn it true,

To bang it from a savage blue,
Jangling the metal of the strings . . . (*CP*, 166)

Though Kermode's explanation that the stanza 'concerns the difficulty of apprehending the real quality of the human mind'[18] may be helpful to understand the stanza, the savage descriptions perplex even this interpretation. The repeated use of infinitives contributes to the development of the desired end: 'To bang it from a savage blue, / Jangling the metal of the string'. We might recall that in Stevens's colour scheme 'blue' often hints at the imagination. To put it differently, it is necessary for the poet to become savage in order to bring out the violent force of the imagination. As for the savage image represented in the first six lines, Stevens explains, 'On farms in Pennsylvania a hawk is nailed up, I believe, to frighten off other hawks. Here in New England a bird is more likely to be nailed up merely as an extraordinary object to be exhibited; that is what I had in mind'.[19] The process of making a nailed up hawk or a kind of scarecrow serves as a metaphor for the cruelty that Wordsworth describes as murdering to dissect in 'The Tables Turned' (1798): 'Our meddling intellect / Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things; – We murder to dissect' (26-28). Wordsworth warns that the knowledge gained through book learning alone is useless compared to what nature provides. It rather destroys the 'beauteous forms of things' of the organic universe

[18] Kermode 68.
[19] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 359.

which refuses to be dissected. Though the context is different, Stevens himself evokes what it might be like to 'murder to dissect'. He does so to train his imaginative self in the violence needed to combat the violence of reality. Rehder suggests, 'The dissection emphasises that the truth of life is to be found within, and it is almost as if the man's power is taken from him by an act of cannibalism'.[20] An overpowering reality pressing against imagination is uncontrollable. To confront the overpowering reality, the savage power of the imagination is trained through enduring a savage act.

Another example of discord arises when, according to an ever-changing reality, the imagination must have constant change. The problem is that it seems to be an impossible task to make a music for 'things as they are'. Therefore the poet's music turns into 'this buzzing of the blue guitar' (*CP*, 167). However in stanza XII, Stevens says, 'The blue guitar / And I are one' (*CP*, 171), showing an almost harmonious union between imagination and reality.

> Tom-tom, c'est moi. The blue guitar
> And I are one. The orchestra
>
> Fills the high hall with shuffling men
> High as the hall. The whirling noise
>
> Of a multitude dwindles, all said,
> To his breath that lies awake at night.
>
> I know that timid breathing. Where
> Do I begin and end? And where,
>
> As I strum the thing, do I pick up
> That which momentously declares

[20] Rehder 159.

Itself not to be I and yet

Must be. It could be nothing else. (*CP*, 171)

We have a slight doubt about oneness in the penultimate sentence: 'And where, / As I strum the thing, do I pick up / That which momentously declares / Itself not to be I and yet / Must be.' (*CP*, 171). At the same time, the interrogative sentence without a question mark may give us a sense that the poet feels he has reached a definite answer, 'Yes, poetry and I must be one'. But this assured statement is again qualified by the use of 'could' in the final sentence, 'It could be nothing else'. The poet, subtly avoiding an easy compromise, finds the significance of poetry through his own performance, his own accompaniment to and, indeed, on the Blue Guitar.

For his performance, Stevens plays the masculine guitar, as a symbol of the 'masculine' imagination. In 'The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet' Stevens unites the 'virility' of the poet and the 'masculine' imagination.

> We have been referring constantly to the simple figure of the youth, in his character of poet, as virile poet. The reason for this is that if, for the poet, the imagination is paramount, and if he dwells apart in his imagination, as the philosopher dwells in his reason, and as the priest dwells in his belief, the masculine nature that we propose for one that must be the master of our lives will be lost as, for example, in the folds of the garments of the ghost or ghosts of Aristotle.[21]

Stevens is concerned about the problem of solipsistic indulgence in an imaginative world completely isolated from reality. If the poet cannot use the 'masculine' imagination to confront the force of reality, if he fails to be a 'virile poet', he 'dwells apart in his imagination' and falls into solipsism. Therefore Stevens does not represent his guitar in the passive terms used by Coleridge in 'The Eolian Harp':

Full many a thought uncall'd and undetain'd,

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[21] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 66-67.

> And many idle flitting phantasies,
> Traverse my indolent and passive brain
> As wild and various, as the random gales
> That swell and flutter on this subject Lute! (39-43)

In contrast to Coleridge's alluring passivity in the 'Eolian Harp', Shelley's 'Æolian lyre' described in A Defence of Poetry reveals, as argued before[22], a reciprocal communion between the internal and the external, the mind and nature. The 'Æolian lyre' is transformed into a guitar in Shelley's two lyrics, 'With a Guitar. To Jane' and 'To Jane'. In the former poem, we are told 'The artist wrought this loved guitar, / And taught it justly to reply / To all who question skilfully / In language gentle as thine own'. In the latter the poet asserts, 'So your voice most tender / To the strings without soul had then given / Its own'. Unlike the Romantic desire for a peaceful and happy union of poetry and nature, Stevens's new Romanticism is composed from a wild music. It is necessary for the poet to confront violent reality with the savage imagination as a counter-force to realise in a post-Romantic manner the Romantic desire for reconciliation between poetry and nature. Thus Stevens's poetic music assumes a new and quite different character from Romantic poetic music. Weston suggests,

> "The Man With the Blue Guitar" is the first plumbing of that violent self: "It is / An animal". This clawed and fanged beast of the self Stevens offers in contradiction to traditional notions of the mind: "angelic ones / Speak of the soul, the mind". The violent self can only make its existence known on the blue guitar: "On that its claws propound, its fangs / Articulate its desert days" (XVII).[23]

It is important for Stevens to have not the angelic imagination of Romanticism but an imagination in touch with 'the violent self' if he is to create a new and vital Romanticism.

The 'virile' poet who sets the violent imagination against the pressure of reality

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[22] See Chapter 1, 17-18 and Chapter 2, 62-63.
[23] Weston 67.

assumes the fierce animality of the human which, as we observed, was represented in the dissective act and is again represented in the ferocious image of the monstrous player: 'The blue guitar – On that its claws propound, its fangs / Articulate its desert days' (*CP*, 174). In Rehder's words, 'the curving fingers of the guitarist and the hawk's talons' become the predatory *claws* and *fangs*, and this predator is within. This is our savage centre'. Rehder continues, 'We are inhabited by a violent inner voraciousness, a hunger that makes the world a desert. Similarly, the world confronts us like a wild animal of overwhelming strength'. In stanza XVI Stevens also describes the earth as

> . . . not earth but a stone,
> Not the mother that held men as they fell
>
> But stone, but like a stone, no: not
> The mother, but an oppressor, but like
>
> An oppressor that grudges them their death,
> As it grudges the living that they live. (*CP*, 173)

Stevens denies the idea of benevolent Mother Earth and gives her a hard image of 'stone' and, furthermore, features her as an 'oppressor'. 'The poet attempts to cope with this power by taking it in to himself.'[24] Stevens, who is strongly conscious of the violence of reality, takes in its power to ensure a balance of power between the violence within and the violence without.

> That I may reduce the monster to
> Myself, and then may be myself
>
> In face of the monster, be more than part
> Of it, more than the monstrous player of

[24] Rehder 163.

One of its monstrous lutes, not be
Alone, but reduce the monster and be,

Two things, the two together as one,
And play of the monster and of myself,

Or better not of myself at all,
But of that as its intelligence,

Being the lion in the lute
Before the lion locked in stone. (*CP*, 175)

Stevens explains in his letters that 'the monster is what one faces: the lion locked in stone (life) which one wished to match in intelligence and force' and that 'monster = nature, which I desire to reduce: master, subjugate, acquire complete control over and use freely for my own purpose, as poet'.[25] To keep the balance, the interplay between the two must not be lost. Once lost, the imagination is overwhelmed by reality and loses its power. Therefore against the violent reality the imagination assumes violence. If violent reality is 'the lion locked in stone', the lute, synecdoche for the imagination, must be also inhabited by the lion – 'the lion in the lute'.

The energetic power of violence in the imagination also helps to free poetry from

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[25] Stevens comments on the section in this way.

> The monster is what one faces: the lion locked in stone (life) which one wished to match in intelligence and force, speaking (as a poet) with a voice matching its own. One thing about life is that the mind of one man, if strong enough, can become the master of all the life in the world. To some extent, this is an everyday phenomenon. Any really great poet, musician, etc. does this. Letters of Wallace Stevens 360.

> Monster=nature, which I desire to reduce: master, subjugate, acquire complete control over and use freely for my own purpose, as poet. I want, as poet, to be that in nature, which constitutes nature's very self. I want to be nature in the form of a man, with all the resources of nature=I want to be the lion in the lute; and then, when I am, I want to face my parent and be his true part. I want to face nature the way two lions face one another – the lion in the lute facing the lion locked in stone. I want, as a man of the imagination, to write poetry with all the power of a monster equal in strength to that of the monster about whom I write. I want man's imagination to be completely adequate in the face of reality. Letters of Wallace Stevens 790.

the literary history which has now become obsolete. Bornstein indicates that the stanza quoted above shows a 'typical romantic confrontation of the poet with nature' by saying, 'Stevens needed his swerve into imagination's violence to prevent his complete absorption into romantic tradition'. The 'mind's violence', Bornstein points out, 'could destroy as well as create. Specifically, it could demolish imprisoning structures of the past to clear the ground for new imaginative activity in an ongoing cycle'.[26] This explanation can be applied not only to liberation from the old Romanticism but also to the poet's daily creation. He needs to have the 'mind's violence' in order not to fall into stale representation which is Romantic in a pejorative sense. We would like to recall Stevens's insistence: 'But poetry is essentially romantic, only the romantic of poetry must be something constantly new'.[27]

However, the problem is that 'The Man with the Blue Guitar' makes us wonder whether the poet can cleanse himself of all fictional accretions.

> Is this picture of Picasso's, this "hoard
> Of destructions", a picture of ourselves,
>
> Now, an image of our society?
> Do I sit, deformed, a naked egg,
>
> Catching at Good-bye, harvest moon,
> Without seeing the harvest or the moon?
>
> Things as they are have been destroyed.
> Have I? Am I a man that is dead
>
> At a table on which the food is cold?
> Is my thought a memory, not alive?

[26] Bornstein, Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens 192.
[27] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 277.

Is the spot on the floor, there, wine or blood

And whichever it may be, is it mine? (*CP*, 173)

Stevens writes in 'The Relation between Poetry and Painting' in The Necessary Angel, 'Does not the saying of Picasso that a picture is a horde of destructions also say that a poem is a horde of destructions? When Braque says "The senses deform, the mind forms", he is speaking to poet, painter, musician and sculptor.'[28] Suggesting the absence of metaphysical value in modern life, Gelpi says that 'the deformity or formlessness of modern life required decreation as a condition for creation, reduction as the pre-requisite for invention'.[29] The preference for 'destruction' rather than 'decreation' in the poem can be explained by the fact that the stanza suggests the cubist still life of Picasso which has a strong visual appeal of 'destruction'. As a means of conveying artistic freedom from conventional representation, 'Stevens himself was attracted to Picasso's phrase for a painting as "a hoard of destructions" – a phrase emphasizing the artist's need to dismantle "reality" before rearranging it (in no matter how "life-like" a way) in art'.[30] Central to Stevens's new Romanticism is self-conscious artifice in poetry. Bloom's interpretation provides assistance:

> Picasso had tried to define the difference between earlier paintings and his own work by calling past painting a total amount (sum or hoard) of additions and his painting a total amount of destructions. This is the starting point of section XV, where the destruction culminates in the metonymic "spot" which is a parody of Stevens himself reduced to the First Idea of man.[31]

Stanza XV given above shows Stevens's excessive abstraction. What the images are intended to convey is reduced to a too abstracted state which perplexes the poet himself.

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[28] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 161.
[29] Gelpi 76.
[30] Vendler, The Music of What Happens 77.
[31] Bloom, Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate 126.

The failure of abstraction lies in the imagination which is unable to cope with the ever-changing nature of reality. To borrow Doggett's interpretation, 'It is because of incessant passage in the present moment that the world is seen only the moment after, and this lightning passage occurs within the life of experience in such a way that whatever is entering that life is simultaneously departing'.[32] Stevens, who feels the limit of words in responding to the 'incessant passage in the present moment', asks 'Is my thought a memory, not alive?' The whole stanza consists of interrogative sentences, raising an epistemological problem. As we shall see later in the next chapter, though abstraction is adopted as a poetic technique, the question then arises whether Stevens can abstract reality or not. But if art has such difficulty in capturing even a part of reality, then it is hard to see how destruction can provide the basis for a new creation. Bloom continues, 'The disabling fear is that Stevens himself is only another "hoard of destructions", who can hear words as words, but no longer can see and feel the veritable harvest or the actual moon'.[33] Indeed, from the stanza which consists of just firing questions at us, we can guess an expected answer, which may be, 'Yes, I have destroyed things as they are and my thought is nothing but a dead memory'. But it is unlike Stevens to have such a negative view. On the contrary we might expect a positive answer since he is a 'virile' poet who, by reducing himself to 'the First Idea of man', can begin a new creation that will keep pace with the incessant process of nature.

By intentionally constructing a fiction in opposition to reality, the poet explores the possibility of repossessing reality as he mentions in a later poem, where he 'Searches a possible for its possibleness' ('An Ordinary Evening in New Haven', *CP*, 481). The poem moves from the harmonious moment to discord and back to the harmonious again, showing itself as employing a rhetoric suited to the virile

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[32] Doggett, Stevens' Poetry of Thought 59.

[33] Bloom, Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate 127. A central idea in Stevens, 'the first idea' is explicated in 'It Must be Abstract' in 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction'. And the reduction to 'the first idea' can be reworded as 'decreation', which is also deeply related to the content of 'It Must be Abstract'. Later I shall try to give a more precise account of Simone Weil's term, 'decreation'.

imagination. Bornstein highlights 'Stevens' provisionality' as explaining the importance of momentary harmony for Stevens's new Romanticism. Bornstein explains,

> He [Stevens] feared that language inherently falsified, if not by initial distortion then by permanent condition. "I am evading a definition", he declared in "The Noble Rider". "If it is defined, it will be fixed and it must not be fixed." (NA 34) Combined with his views on change and cyclicity, Stevens' distrust of language demanded provisionality as the only viable poetic strategy.[34]

According to his belief in ever-changing reality, Stevens desired that the poetic product should not become fixed and stale. As we shall see later in the next chapter, the attempt to realise 'provisionality as the only viable poetic strategy' depends on a never-ending cyclicity in poetic creativity. Therefore the union between imagination and reality must be momentary to be decreated for a new union.

Stevens says in 'The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet', 'The pleasure that the poet has there is a pleasure of agreement with the radiant and productive world in which he lives'. It is because the 'agreement with reality' promises the poet 'the *mundo* of the imagination in which the imaginative man delights and not the gaunt world of the reason'[35]. The product gained through overcoming the dichotomy between imagination and reality can be a dream of poetry, which turns into the mind's own reality.

> A dream (to call it a dream) in which
> I can believe, in face of the object,
>
> A dream no longer a dream, a thing,
> Of things as they are, as the blue guitar

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[34] Bornstein, Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens 189-90.
[35] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 57.

After long strumming on certain nights
Gives the touch of the senses, . . . (*CP*, 174)

The imagination acting upon reality supplies us with poetic truth as 'the truth of credible things'[36], whose values and satisfactions 'must take the place / Of empty heaven and its hymns' (*CP*, 167) or religious belief.

The earth, for us, is flat and bare.
There are no shadows. Poetry

Exceeding music must take the place
Of empty heaven and its hymns,

Ourselves in poetry must take their place,
Even in the chattering of your guitar. (*CP*, 167)

The mocking descriptions of the earth as 'flat and bare' and 'the place / Of empty heaven and its hymns' bring out one of the strongest notes in his poetry, whose tones are surprisingly various. Here Stevens comically suggests our orphaned state when God is no longer relevant to a world where religion has collapsed. But the decisive expression makes for a tone of confidence in poetry. Stevens paraphrases this stanza, 'We live in a world plainly plain. Everything is as you see it. There is no other world. Poetry, then, is the only possible heaven. It must necessarily be the poetry of ourselves; its source is in our imagination (even in the chattering, etc.)'.[37] In modern reality where we cannot have any religious thought credible as truth, we have to create something which will satisfy our need for significance. Therefore Stevens repeatedly states the importance of poetry itself. We may recall his early poem, 'Another Weeping Woman' where he speaks of 'The magnificent cause of being, / The imagination, the one reality / In this imagined world' (*CP*, 25). In 'The Man with the Blue Guitar' Stevens affirms his belief in a redemptive function of poetry.

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[36] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 53.
[37] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 360.

In stanza XXII Stevens describes the relation not only between poetry and reality but also between poetry and us, showing a social conscience.

> Poetry is the subject of the poem,
> From this the poem issues and
>
> To this returns. Between the two,
> Between issue and return, there is
>
> An absence in reality,
> Things as they are. Or so we say.
>
> But are these separate? Is it
> An absence for the poem, which acquires
>
> Its true appearances there, sun's green,
> Cloud's red, earth feeling, sky that thinks?
>
> From these it takes. Perhaps it gives,
> In the universal intercourse. (*CP*, 176-77)

Before turning to the subject of the poet's social conscience, we must draw attention to the subject of poetry. The first sentence, 'Poetry is the subject of the poem, / From this the poem issues and / To this returns' shows that the theme of the poem is about poetry for its own sake. Stevens asserts in The Necessary Angel:

> The theory of poetry, as a subject of study, was something with respect to which I had nothing but the most ardent ambitions. It seemed to me to be one of the great subjects of study. I do not mean one more *Ars Poetica* having to do, say, with the techniques of poetry and perhaps with its history. I mean poetry itself, the naked poem, the imagination

> manifesting itself in its domination of words.[38]

Stevens's valid purpose for poetry is to create a sensuously concrete and autonomous artefact. As Gelpi suggests, a characteristic of Modernism in Stevens is shown by his attitude towards 'pure poetry'. 'Since poetry consists of words, the more poetry inclines away from descriptive referentiality toward autotelic self-referentiality and hypostasized self-subsistence, the more purely evocative the language.' In other words, 'pure poetry' created through the 'linkages which extend and translate sensed objects into the fictive linguistic world' involves the 'alternate "life" of words' which Stevens comes to call the 'mundo of the imagination'. [39] Stevens embodies his theory in the practice, challenging verisimilitude, of exploring to what degree insubstantial words can be true to life. Rehder summarises Stevens's comments on the stanza described in his letters, paying attention to his thoughts about 'pure poetry'.

> 'Poetry is the spirit, as the poem is the body. . . . The purpose of writing poetry is to attain pure poetry' (10 Aug 1940). Pure poetry for Stevens was not only (as he states to Latimer, 31 Oct 1935) 'the idea of images and images alone, or images and the music of verse together', but also (as he tells Simons, 28 Aug 1940) a belief in the imagination as, 'at least potentially, as great as the idea of God, and . . . greater, if the idea of God is only one of the things of the imagination'. 'The validity of the poet', he continues (10 Aug 1940), 'is wholly a matter of' his ability to make a comprehensive statement about the meaning of everything – making it clear that he writes because his life depends on it.[40]

From his letters, we can guess what Stevens's valid purpose for poetry is: the composition of poetry is centred in 'pure poetry' which provides its relation to life. What Stevens means by 'pure poetry' is the reification of what the imagination makes from reality as significance. For example in 'The Idea of Order at Key West', though the significant experience was dramatised without religious or

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[38] Stevens, The Necessary Angel vii-viii.
[39] Gelpi 56-57.
[40] Rehder 174.

metaphysical sense, it was offered as a means of 'life's redemption'.

From the next sentence the subject of poetry subtly slides to the subject of the relation between poetry and reality and then to the relation between poetry and us. The relation between poetry and reality is explained by Riddel: 'What the guitarsman has discovered once more, in essence, is a theory of poetry, that the act of poetry is a thing itself, that "things as they are" *are* only when contained in a mind, or married to mind in a poem'.[41] 'Things as they are' are transformed into what the mind imagines and exists in poetry as the real. The marriage between reality and mind or imagination represents how closely they relate to each other. It is useful to quote the paraphrase of the stanza by Stevens.

> Poetry is a passion, not a habit. This passion nourishes itself on reality. Imagination has no source except in reality, and ceases to have any value when it departs from reality. Here is a fundamental principle about the imagination: It does not create except as it transforms. There is nothing that exists exclusively by reason of the imagination, or that does not exist in some form in reality. Thus, reality = the imagination, and the imagination = reality. Imagination gives, but gives in relation.[42]

The relation between the two is succinctly shown in an equation: 'reality = the imagination' and vice versa. Therefore, when Stevens says, 'there is an absence in reality', there exists nothing which precludes the relation: reality = the imagination. Stevens repeatedly dwells on the 'reality-imagination complex', recognising how inextricably reality and the imagination are related. In 'The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet' he argues about 'the best definition of true imagination'.

> . . . it is the sum of our faculties. Poetry is the scholar's art. The acute intelligence of the imagination, the illimitable resources of its memory, its power to possess the moment it perceives – if we were speaking of light itself, and thinking of the relationship between objects and lights no

[41] Riddel 144.
[42] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 364.

> further demonstration would be necessary. Like light, it adds nothing, except itself.[43]

Quoting these sentences, Beckett explains, 'The imagination "adds nothing, except itself". Behind such a statement is Stevens's constant devotion to reality, his belief that the phrase "the truth of the imagination" has a meaning only with respect to the imagination's relation with reality'.[44] Furthermore the relation is emphasised when he says, 'Imagination gives, but gives in relation'. This statement can be applied to the last sentence of stanza XXII: 'Perhaps it gives, / In the universal intercourse' (*CP*, 177). The lack of any object for the verb, 'gives' enables us to paraphrase the sentence as 'Poetry gives us the true appearance of physical phenomena in the universal intercourse.' The guitarist gives us a message for our participation in relation to poetry and leads us to acknowledge the significance of poetry. A public performance of poetry through the guitar recital shows the poet's attitude towards immediate contact with his audience. In this sense the poem opens itself to society.

Stevens, overcoming the 'reality-imagination complex', arrives at a final if provisional resolution. The 'universal intercourse' between the mind and reality is sung like a duet.

> A few final solutions, like a duet
> With the undertaker: a voice in the clouds,
>
> Another on earth, the one a voice
> Of ether, the other smelling of drink,
>
> The voice of ether prevailing, the swell
> Of the undertaker's song in the snow
>
> Apostrophizing wreaths, the voice

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[43] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 61.
[44] Beckett 42.

In the clouds serene and final, next

The grunted breath serene and final,
The imagined and the real, thought

And the truth, Dichtung and Wahrheit, all
Confusion solved, as in a refrain

One keeps on playing year by year,
Concerning the nature of things as they are. (*CP*, 177)

What is striking about the duet is its odd combination of the 'undertaker' and the 'voice in the clouds': the former is the 'real', the latter the 'imagined'. Vendler comments,

> Though the images are contrastive, they are placed in identical apposition, and since the natural tendency of apposition is the equation of the things listed, the lulling of the duet, as it proceeds from its initial "solutions" to its concluding "solved", becomes ever less oppositional, until both voices, in identical modification, become equally serene and final. Also, they become equally lofty: the "low" undertaker, grunting and smelling of drink, has been raised to the dignity of Wahrheit, and perfect parity is attained between the adversaries, not only in social and syntactic levels, but in rhythm too, as the lines become cryptodimeters:
>
> The imagined and the real,
> Thought and the truth,
> Dichtung and Wahrheit,
> All confusion solved.[45]

Vendler's analysis of the structure lays bare the way Stevens expresses his ideas about the synthetic power of the imagination to reconcile opposites. The structure

[45] Vendler, On Extended Wings 135-36.

of contrastive images in identical apposition serves as a poetic manoeuvre to reconcile the opposing forces of the mind and the real; the opposing images are interlaced intricately until the duet becomes a solo. Stevens constructs his own bridge between the two opposing elements in his poetry.

The problem of the co-existence of poetry with reality exemplified in the poem disappears and the harmonious union is realised. And even if the harmony is momentary, it gives us the dream of poetry, through which this world looks illuminated and ordered. With this promise the poem ends.

> That generation's dream, aviled
> In the mud, in Monday's dirty light,
>
> That's it, the only dream they knew,
> Time in its final block, not time
>
> To come, a wrangling of two dreams.
> Here is the bread of time to come,
>
> Here is its actual stone. The bread
> Will be our bread, the stone will be
>
> Our bed and we shall sleep by night.
> We shall forget by day, except
>
> The moments when we choose to play
> The imagined pine, the imagined jay. (*CP*, 183-84)

We are afflicted with the darker side of reality: 'That generation's dream, aviled / In the mud, in Monday's dirty light'. Even if we have a dream, owing to reality pressing us so much, our dream yields to a mere dream, which we feel like a lifeless stone. Riddel explains,

> Thus ever is our life in this block of time, ugly and vulgar; but we can

> "choose". And the last note of the guitar gives back to man his freedom, setting him alone at the center, maker of himself though not yet of the world. What he can choose is not to live beyond the world but to live in it – choose, that is, to live in the imagination.[46]

It is our choice to 'live in the imagination' which makes a 'dream no longer a dream' (*CP*, 174). The bed of stone suggests the death of the imagination. But by playing the Blue Guitar, by creating poetry, we can have that 'waking dream' which Keats evokes in 'Ode to a Nightingale'. When the dream of poetry loses 'a sense of the freshness or vividness of life'[47], owing to its temporariness, it is necessary to 'forget' or decreate it by day for a new dream. It depends on our choice whether we can save ourselves through the imagination. As Rehder says, 'Poetry provides us with an alternative to our Monday world; it is that world transformed'.[48] Since we cannot dream the other world, 'Poetry / Exceeding music must take the place / Of empty heaven and its hymns, / Ourselves in poetry must take their place, / Even in the chattering of your guitar' (*CP*, 167).

As we observed, to realise Stevens's new Romanticism, a vital imagination is required. The imagination must be energetic enough to confront the ever-changing reality. Through the acknowledgement of reality as a continual shaping, the 'reality-imagination complex' enters into a new phase. Parts of a World has some poems where a continual exchange between the imagination and reality is treated. Stevens develops the subject of never-ending process in both the world and poetic creation towards a 'supreme fiction'. Stevens's poetry, as we have seen, is founded on realities in the living world. At the beginning of Chapter 3, quoting the lines from 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven', we noted the process of becoming in the living world. It is from this acknowledgement that the literary mode for the 'supreme fiction' emerges. Stevens writes, 'I don't have ideas that are permanently fixed' (31 Oct. 1935) and 'The only possible order of life is one in

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[46] Riddel 146.
[47] Stevens, 'Adagia' in Opus Posthumous 184.
[48] Rehder 173.

which all order is incessantly changing' (5 Nov. 1935).[49] Continuously making ever-new arrangements out of reality supplies the principle of a literary mode. 'The Glass of Water' (1938) shows a tricky relationship between the imagination and reality.

> That the glass would melt in heat,
> That the water would freeze in cold,
> Shows that this object is merely a state,
> One of many, between two poles. So,
> In the metaphysical, there are these poles. (*CP*, 197)

Glass or water changes itself from a solid state to a liquid one or vice versa in a constant flux and movement in nature or the physical world. The glass of water is 'merely a state, / One of many, between two poles'. Either pole, solid or liquid can be realised 'in the metaphysical' where 'there are these poles' or where the fixed state is sustained permanently.

Then the problem is how the imagination relates to this changing nature.

> Here in the centre stands the glass. Light
> Is the lion that comes down to drink. There
> And in that state, the glass is a pool.
> Ruddy are his eyes and ruddy are his claws
> When light comes down to wet his frothy jaws
>
> And in the water winding weeds move round. (*CP*, 197)

The quoted lines echo Keats's wish for poetic inspiration in 'Ode to a Nightingale':

> O for a beaker full of the warm South,
> Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
> With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
> And purple-stained mouth;
> That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,

---

[49] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 289, 291-92.

And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Keats's beaker of wine with 'beaded bubbles winking at the brim' is transformed by Stevens into a 'pool' where the lion 'comes down to wet his frothy jaws'. Unlike Keats's mythical fountain, Stevens's source of a new Romanticism is described in a very modest way, 'a pool'. But in the small world of the pool an ever-changing nature exists: 'in the water winding weeds move round'. The rotary motion of the supple weeds in the water gives the sequence of images which is never ending. It is to this source of the poetic creation that Stevens's new Romanticism has recourse. This develops into the idea of 'repetition', suggesting that imaginative creativity progresses by going 'round, / And round and round, [...] merely going round' in 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction' (*CP*, 405).

In 'The Glass of Water' the lion is the incarnation of the light of imagination. The image of the lion suggests the savage imagination described in 'The Man with the Blue Guitar' as 'Being the lion in the lute / Before the lion locked in stone' (*CP*, 175). The savage image of the imagination appears repeatedly in Stevens's poetry. For example, in 'Poetry is a Destructive Force' (1938) he posits a powerful imagination imaged as a 'violent beast' (*CP*, 193) like a lion. To keep up with the changing world it is necessary for the imagination to have a 'destructive force' to enable a continuous creation. The artistic process of creation and self-destruction is a process that corresponds to the chaos of the universe. The 'destructive' as well as constructive force is required to keep the continual process of adjusting the mind to the outside world.

In 'The Glass of Water' the moment the 'destructive force' works is dramatically represented.

> And there and in another state – the refractions,
> The *metaphysica*, the plastic parts of poems
> Crash in the mind – But, fat Jocundus, worrying
> About what stands here in the centre, . . . (*CP*, 197)

The movement from the 'here' of reality to the 'there' of the imagined, from 'merely a state' to 'another state' shows the commitment of the imagination to reality. And

when the commitment reaches a climax, creating 'another state', the 'destructive force' of the imagination works with a 'crash'. To continue ever-new creation, the fictive world must be destroyed so as not to be fixed. The climax of the imagination is comically represented as 'fat Jocundus'. At the moment when the imagination and reality is in a state of equilibrium, a saturated imagination risks a stale sameness, the '*metaphysica*'. It is the pleasure of the imagination to be saturated and then be emptied in order to be saturated again. The poem ends describing the unending creativity of the imagination:

> . . . In a village of the indigenes,
> One would have still to discover. Among the dogs and dung,
> One would continue to contend with one's ideas. (*CP*, 198)

The verb 'discover' does not take an object; however, we can guess the object should be 'what will suffice' mentioned in a later poem, 'Of Modern Poetry' (*CP*, 239). The discovering act entails a creative and destructive force, a force that creates and destroys what is imagined. Therefore the mind continuously has to 'contend with [its] ideas', to re-establish an immediate contact with reality by means of new and fresh ideas.

In 1938 Stevens successively writes poems on the interplay of the 'reality-imagination complex' in the mutable world. In 'Study of Two Pears' (1938), Stevens makes over the poem as a still-life painting of two pears, which are observed in different ways.

> Opusculum paedagogum.
> The pears are not viols,
> Nudes or bottles.
> They resemble nothing else. (*CP*, 196)

The attempt to hold the image of pears fails. The word loses its bearings since the poet knows that the demand that he should represent what he sees is self-contradictory. The strange medley of images developed through six stanzas gives us more of the real pears than any single snapshot or meticulous painting could ever contain. But we cannot fix on the canvas the imaginary impression of a

fleeting moment. Therefore the poem concludes with 'The pears are not seen / As the observer wills' (*CP*, 197). Pack also indicates, 'No longer do the pears exist by themselves and no longer can the observer hold them in isolation or fix them in a description'.[50]

Stevens, who treats the epistemological subject repeatedly, gives us an impression that he tries to convince himself of the limitations of words in capturing reality. In 'The Poems of Our Climate' (1938) by representing another still-life painting of the water, the bowl and the flowers, the conviction is stated as if he tries to mitigate the longing for something more real than reality itself.

> There would still remain the never-resting mind,
> So that one would want to escape, come back
> To what had been so long composed.
> The imperfect is our paradise.
> Note that, in this bitterness, delight,
> Since the imperfect is so hot in us,
> Lies in flawed words and stubborn sounds. (*CP*, 194)

The attempt to embellish the still life with a decorative light or to reduce it to 'complete simplicity' (*CP*, 193) does not satisfy the poet since 'There would still remain the never-resting mind'. The statement, 'The imperfect is our paradise', becomes the solution to console the 'never-resting mind'. To correspond with a nature which is forever becoming and is never perfected, the artistic product should be in a state of becoming and imperfection. Like in 'Of Bright & Blue Birds & the Gala Sun' (1940) where 'being imperfect' (*CP*, 248) is taken positively, the satisfaction with 'the imperfect' of the fiction is suggested in 'The Poems of Our Climate'. Riddel says that 'it is the imperfect which drives him to imagine, to create in flawed words those poems in which alone there is delight.'[51] Owing to the limitations of words, the poet cannot make his artistic creation a flawless piece. The inability to transform reality into the created world is also reflected in the

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[50] Pack 175.
[51] Riddel 154.

verbal utterance which sounds 'stubborn', resisting harmonious music. To put it the other way around, to represent the immediacy of the natural world in verbal art is an impossible task. But Stevens's imagination craves to bridge the disparity between the thing and words.

In 'The Man on the Dump' (1938) through a fiction which might be imperfect, Stevens tries to grasp what the truth is in the world governed by change. The stage for the poem is the same abominable reality as Crispin's, which he could accept as the very reality.

> Day creeps down. The moon is creeping up.
> The sun is a corbeil of flowers the moon Blanche
> Places there, a bouquet. Ho-ho . . . The dump is full
> Of images. Days pass like papers from a press.
> The bouquets come here in the papers. So the sun,
> And so the moon, both come, and the janitor's poems
> Of every day, the wrapper on the can of pears,
> The cat in the paper-bag, the corset, the box
> From Esthonia: the tiger chest, for tea. (*CP*, 201)

Pack explains,

> The central metaphor of "The Man on the Dump" (p.201) is that of a poet sitting amid a pile of his own images which have become irrelevant to the world of fact and are, therefore, no longer part of the correspondence of person and place: "Ho-ho . . . The dump is full / Of images". The whole poem is giddy with images that have lost their relationship to reality, and which the imagination must abandon.[52]

The stale images which 'have lost their relationship to reality' seem to become chronic since the imagination does not start on a new cycle from the day to the night to return to a new reality. The day of the imagination does not change to the night of the imagination since the image of 'bouquet' given by the moon remains during the day and the night: 'The sun is a corbeil of flowers the moon Blanche /

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[52] Pack 83.

Places there'. The imagination comes to a standstill in the cycle; all the images have become stale like the 'dump'. Suffering from the chronic stagnation of the imagination, the poet hysterically repeats 'dew' with variations.

> The green smacks in the eye, the dew in the green
> Smacks like fresh water in a can, like the sea
> On a cocoanut – how many men have copied dew
> For buttons, how many women have covered themselves
> With dew, dew dresses, stones and chains of dew, heads
> Of the floweriest flowers dewed with the dewiest dew. (*CP*, 202)

The persistently repeated 'dew' loses freshness and becomes an accumulation of rubbish. Even the superlative expressions do not work effectively to enhance the freshness in 'dew'. 'One grows to hate these things except on the dump' (*CP*, 202).

The dump changes from the rubbish of stale images in the first half of the poem to the literally dirty reality of a pile of rubbish in the latter half. Giving the image of the dump two meanings, Stevens slightly changes the setting where he stands. After stating that 'All poets are, to some extent, romantic poets', Stevens continues, 'What, then, is a romantic poet now-a-days? He happens to be one who still dwells in an ivory tower, but who insists that life there would be intolerable except for the fact that one has, from the top, such an exceptional view of the public dump . . .'[53] For a Romantic poet in the modern age, the dirty aspects of reality are an inseparable part which he must accept. The following stanza attempts to make the transition from stale images of the dump to reality itself. With the arrival of spring there is a movement in the poem.

> Now, in the time of spring (azaleas, trilliums,
> Myrtle, viburnums, daffodils, blue phlox),
> Between that disgust and this, between the things
> That are on the dump (azaleas and so on)
> And those that will be (azaleas and so on),
> One feels the purifying change. One rejects

[53] Stevens, 'Williams' in Opus Posthumous 214.

The trash. (*CP*, 202)

Between the dump which has been 'a cemetery of dead metaphors'[54] and the dump which will be a new reality for fresh images, 'One feels the purifying change'. The very reality to which a lively imagination in the new cycle must adhere is the dump-like modern reality which the poet romantically transforms into a fiction. By rejecting stale images as 'trash', the poet returns for a new poetic activity to the reality purged of any innate ideas:

That's the moment when the moon creeps up
To the bubbling of bassoons. That's the time
One looks at the elephant-colorings of tires.
Everything is shed; and the moon comes up as the moon
(All its images are in the dump) and you see
As a man (not like an image of a man),
You see the moon rise in the empty sky. (*CP*, 202)

Rehder comments, 'Thus he abstracts his self from the continuous copying and, truly and completely himself (and not as an image of himself), sees the moon itself (divested of all its images) rise in the empty sky of the moment's purity'.[55] Stevens's suggestion that 'we must somehow cleanse the imagination of the romantic'[56] may be recalled again here. The world washed with the imagination provides the poet with a clear vision of reality. But ironically the reality in which the new poetic activity will occur is the dump.

The poem concludes with successive questions and a definite answer, 'The the' (*CP*, 203).

One sits and beats an old tin can, lard pail.
One beats and beats for that which one believes.
That's what one wants to get near. Could it after all
Be merely oneself, as superior as the ear

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[54] Rehder 213.
[55] Rehder 213.
[56] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 138.

To a crow's voice? Did the nightingale torture the ear,
Pack the heart and scratch the mind? And does the ear
Solace itself in peevish birds? Is it peace,
Is it a philosopher's honeymoon, one finds
On the dump? Is it to sit among mattresses of the dead,
Bottles, pots, shoes and grass and murmur *aptest eve*:
Is it to hear the blatter of grackles and say
Invisible priest; is it to eject, to pull
The day to pieces and cry *stanza my stone*?
Where was it one first heard of the truth? The the. (*CP*, 202-203)

The condition of the modern poet is described with humorous pathos. Though self-ridicule permeates the stanza, the accumulated images of the unfavourable circumstances increase a sense of poignancy. As a modern poet, Stevens cannot invoke the Romantic music of the nightingale on the dump. Stevens comically suggests that he cannot compose an ode to a nightingale, only one to a crow. The beating sound of the 'old tin can, lard pail' overlaps with the pecking sound of the crow on the dump. The self-derogatory expression suggests the condition of 'poverty' facing the modern poet, from which he must create a supreme fiction. Questioning the condition, 'Is it to sit among mattresses of the dead, / Bottles, pots, shoes and grass and murmur *aptest eve* . . . ?' shows the difficulty of sustaining a Romantic dream. Searching for certainty, 'Where was it one first heard of the truth?', the poem ends with a definite answer 'The the', which contradictorily does not amount to an answer.

'The the' seems to suggest the ultimate abstract word like the 'truth' which cannot be described simply in words. Blessing says,

> One image pattern that permeates *Parts of a World* is the pattern of awakening, of throwing off the grogginess of custom and tradition and prejudgement. The latest freed man, the narrator of "On the Road Home", the man on the dump, and the poet who overhears the workers all affirm the same need to cast off the "old descriptions of the world" and to see the

landscape "like a man without a doctrine".[57]

In 'On the Road Home' (1938), 'It was when I said, / "There is no such thing as the truth", / That the grapes seemed fatter' (*CP*, 203). Without any irritable reaching towards the truth, the sense of unity gained through the exercise of 'Negative Capability' may allow the poet to intuit, as an experience, the nature of truth. Such oneness with reality cannot be described by words accurately since the experience is beyond words. Even though he acknowledges the inadequacy of words to describe what is truth, the poet values the process of seeking after this truth in poetry. Riddel says that 'one cannot know the "the" until he knows the world and what the imagination can make of it'[58], and 'The Man on the Dump' illustrates the process of working towards a difficult enlightenment.

> In the total view, *Parts of a World*, pursuing the "the", comes to a more provisional resolution in "On the Road Home" (CP 203): that there is "no such thing as the truth". And discovering this, the poet is released into a purer sense of how sum is in its every part. The act of the mind, however, is not a single thing, but a process; its creations "suffice" one by one, but the total life of the mind is an act of continuous creation, what Stevens would call later the "never-ending meditation".[59]

Answering, 'The the', for questioning the sense of unity, Stevens leaves the poem open-ended to avoid offering a definite answer. The latent meaning of the very simple answer in two words, 'The the' can be understood as miming the way the poem must form itself through endlessly re-commencing process.

According to Pack, "'Where was it one first heard the truth? The the" says Stevens, ending the poem, and before we can name the truth there will be new trash in the dump that must be cleared. The poet will have to begin again'.[60] This interpretation is illuminating since, as we observed, two subjects overlap in the poem: the first half of the poem is about the stale images which have accumulated

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[57] Blessing 71-72. The quoted phrases are from 'The Latest Freed Man' (*CP*, 204-205).
[58] Riddel 155.
[59] Riddel 159.
[60] Pack 84-85.

into a dump; the latter half is about the dirty reality for the modern poet who desires a Romantic dream. Since the poem consists of two parts, the interpretation of the poem depends on understanding how the two relate to each other creating the process of poetic experience itself. The poet must sustain the never-ending cycle of the creative imagination according to the cycles inherent in the living world; otherwise the product of the imagination becomes the dump of stale images. Though the poem contains a sardonic suggestion that reality is nothing but the dump, from this challenging condition the modern poet in search of the sense of unity is required to create a fiction which is equivalent to the living world. These latent meanings which are revealed through the process of understanding the two structures of the poem are condensed into the stuttering answer, 'The the'; the phrase prompts us to explore possible answers.

In the preceding chapter I remarked that 'Stevens's new Romanticism cannot easily be defined without reference to various aspects of the "reality-imagination complex"'. As we observed, Stevens's ideas about the 'reality-imagination complex' becomes the base from which his poetic strategy for the new Romanticism develops. The fiction created through the interaction between imagination and reality can become part of reality. What makes Stevens's poetry different from Romanticism lies in his belief that fiction can be a substitute for reality and religion. To prevent such a fiction from becoming a solipsistic product of the imagination, the imagination must adhere to reality whose negative aspects the poet must also accept. In 'The Man on the Dump' reality is represented as an unfavourable environment for a Romantic poet in the modern age. In 'Esthétique du Mal' (1944) a negative aspect of reality is again treated: pain and evil cast a shadow on the human condition.

We can assume that Stevens deliberately placed 'Esthétique du Mal' before 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction' in order to insist that pain and evil are indispensable for the human condition from which any supreme fiction is created. The title, 'Esthétique du Mal', recalls Charles Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du Mal. Both poets treat the theme of 'mal'; however, Stevens tries to show us that the

embracement of pain and evil as native to our life enables us to come to terms with the natural world. And in this affirmative view of life we can find an adequate aesthetics. Pack succinctly summarises the poem, 'As the title suggests, evil becomes a question of aesthetics, and ultimately serves an aesthetic end'.[61] Impressed by a groaning Vesuvius which feels no pain, the poet meditates on the sublime at the poem's start:

> Except for us, Vesuvius might consume
> In solid fire the utmost earth and know
> No pain (ignoring the cocks that crow us up
> To die). This is a part of the sublime
> From which we shrink. And yet, except for us,
> The total past felt nothing when destroyed. (*CP*, 314)

The fact that 'pain is human' (*CP*, 314) is emphasised by the repeated uses of 'except for us'. We humans know pain and mourn for mutability. In contrast, nature is indifferent to pain since it does not have feelings. However, nature personified by the poet is regarded as being able to accept and overcome pain. In this transcendental attitude Stevens finds the sublime and reveres it as his principle of life.

In the second stanza the sublime is described in a linguistic light.

> It is pain that is indifferent to the sky
> In spite of the yellow of the acacias, the scent
> Of them in the air still hanging heavily
> In the hoary-hanging night. It does not regard
> This freedom, this supremacy, and in
> Its own hallucination never sees
> How that which rejects it saves it in the end. (*CP*, 315)

We cannot define the precise antecedent of each pronoun in the last four lines since a probable candidate, 'pain', is somewhat distant from the first 'it'. If we take the

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[61] Pack 34.

first two pronouns, 'it' and 'its' (a pronominal adjective) as indicating nature in general, the context comes to be settled. Just before the quoted stanza, the moon is described as 'part of a supremacy always / Above him' and 'always free from him' (*CP*, 314). This is echoed in 'It does not regard / This freedom, this supremacy'. And even if nature is under an illusion that it has feelings, it never sees 'how that which rejects it saves it in the end'. The demonstrative pronoun, 'that', and the two uses of 'it' produce further ambiguities. We can think that Stevens deliberately leaves these pronouns open to various meanings. This is because the poet in meditation felt 'what meditation never quite achieved' (*CP*, 314). Then he continues, 'The moon rose up as if it had escaped / His meditation. It evaded his mind' (*CP*, 314). Nature is beyond his meditation. Therefore he cannot determine what nature signifies. The meaning of the last sentence, through the poet's meditation, becomes as difficult to catch as a 'shadow' (*CP*, 315). However, we can attempt a possible interpretation. The sublime of nature lies in aloofness: nature is beyond human thoughts and indifferent to pain. Though nature rejects us, owing to its sublimity, it saves us in the end. The ambiguous structure reflects the poet's concern that he cannot express satisfactorily what he feels towards nature. The difficulty in filling the gap makes the tone elegiac: 'as he spoke / A kind of elegy he found in space' (*CP*, 315).

Facing the sublime of nature and knowing what effect it has on us, the poet shows a different response to evil from the conventional one.

> His firm stanzas hang like hives in hell
> Or what hell was, since now both heaven and hell
> Are one, and here, O terra infidel.
>
> The fault lies with an over-human god,
> Who by sympathy has made himself a man
> And is not to be distinguished, when we cry
>
> Because we suffer, our oldest parent, peer

Of the populace of the heart, the reddest lord,
Who has gone before us in experience.

If only he would not pity us so much,
Weaken our fate, relieve us of woe both great
And small, a constant fellow of destiny,

A too, too human god, self-pity's kin
And uncourageous genesis . . . It seems
As if the health of the world might be enough.

It seems as if the honey of common summer
Might be enough, as if the golden combs
Were part of a sustenance itself enough,

As if hell, so modified, had disappeared,
As if pain, no longer satanic mimicry,
Could be borne, as if we were sure to find our way. (*CP*, 315-16)

When Stevens says that 'both heaven and hell / Are one', he recalls Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, in which the opposition between Good and Evil is regarded as necessary to stimulate our progression.

> Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.
>
> From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy. (from Plate 3)

Stevens as well as Blake tries to face evil with a tenacious spirit. Without recourse to 'a too, too human god' which the 'uncourageous' human has made, Stevens claims that we should accept this world as it is and find it enough, where we are 'sure to find our way'. With the disappearance of heaven, hell also has gone from

our religious idea. Therefore we cannot accept pain as 'satanic mimicry' in any religious sense but as a part of nature which is felt by us. The acceptance of this world as 'enough' shows a philosophical understanding which allows us to live life to the full. This is suggested by the repeated uses of the expression 'as if', which may imply Stevens's unsureness but suggests some hope for sureness.

Our condition without the consolation provided by God can be regarded as 'poverty'; however, it is possible for us to create something in this world. This is well described by the paradoxical expression, 'exquisite in poverty', in the fifth stanza.

> Softly let all the sympathizers come,
> Without the inventions of sorrow or the sob
> Beyond invention. Within what we permit,
> Within the actual, the warm, the near,
> So great a unity, that it is bliss,
> Ties us to those we love. For this familiar,
> This brother even in the father's eye,
> This brother half-spoken in the mother's throat
> And these regalia, these things disclosed,
> These nebulous brilliancies in the smallest look
> Of the being's deepest darling, we forego
> Lament, willingly forfeit the ai-ai
>
> Of parades in the obscurer selvages.
> Be near me, come closer, touch my hand, phrases
> Compounded of dear relation, spoken twice,
> Once by the lips, once by the services
> Of central sense, these minutiae mean more
> Than clouds, benevolences, distant heads.
> These are within what we permit, in-bar
> Exquisite in poverty against the suns

Of ex-bar, in-bar retaining attributes
With which we vested, once, the golden forms
And the damasked memory of the golden forms
And ex-bar's flower and fire of the festivals
Of the damasked memory of the golden forms,
Before we were wholly human and knew ourselves. (*CP*, 317)

The state of being 'Exquisite in poverty' arises not through 'the inventions of sorrow or the sob' by the weak mind but through the immediate contact with the actual by the strong mind. The loving embrace of nature ought to be realised by accepting things as they are without exaggeration of human pain. This perception is emphasized by the images of closeness: 'Within what we permit, / Within the actual, the warm, the near, / So great a unity, that it is bliss, / Ties us to those we love'. And then it is represented as if the marriage of imagination and reality is ceremonially performed, 'Be near me, come closer, touch my hand, phrases / Compounded of dear relation, spoken twice, / Once by the lips, once by the services / Of central sense'. Fiction or poetry that is the product of this blissful union – 'so great a unity, that it is bliss' – might be trivial but it has exquisiteness: 'these minutiae mean more'. This closeness is contrasted with images of distance such as 'the obscurer selvages' and 'clouds, benevolences, distant heads', showing a realm of imaginative recreation without bearing on reality. The ending of the stanza also suggests the distance. The syntax would support this effectively if a Vendler-like analysis is applied.

the golden forms
the damasked memory of the golden forms
ex-bar's flower and fire of the festivals of the damasked memory of
the golden forms

The last example shows that the lengthy descriptions make it hard for us to reach the essential phrase, 'the golden forms', and understand what imaginative products mean. The more the imagination embellishes reality, the more the distance between the real and the imagined is widened. This solipsistic

imagination comes to exist outside reality. It is termed 'ex-bar' against 'in-bar' which means inside reality. Here we should recall Stevens's insistence on the adherence of the imagination to reality as essential to create a satisfactory fiction.

The desire for union is rephrased as 'the nostalgias' of the imagination for reality.

> He had studied the nostalgias. In these
> He sought the most grossly maternal, the creature
> Who most fecundly assuaged him, the softest
> Woman with a vague moustache and not the mauve
> *Maman*. His anima liked its animal
> And liked it unsubjugated, so that home
> Was a return to birth, a being born
> Again in the savagest severity,
> Desiring fiercely, the child of a mother fierce
> In his body, fiercer in his mind, merciless
> To accomplish the truth in his intelligence.
> It is true there were other mothers, singular
> In form, lovers of heaven and earth, she-wolves
> And forest tigresses and women mixed
> With the sea. These were fantastic. There were homes
> Like things submerged with their englutted sounds,
> That were never wholly still. The softest woman,
> Because she is as she was, reality,
> The gross, the fecund, proved him against the touch
> Of impersonal pain. Reality explained.
> It was the last nostalgia: that he might suffer or that
> He might die was the innocence of living, if life
> Itself was innocent. To say that it was
> Disentangled him from sleek ensolacings. (*CP*, 321-22)

Bloom refers to the 'nostalgias': 'Stevens somberly said of this, "We have imagined

things that we have failed to realize" (*L*, 364), and his lyric is an authentically American elegy, a study of the nostalgias'.[62] Owing to the epistemological problem, 'the imagination with its typical nostalgia for reality tried to go back to recover the world'.[63] When reality transformed through the imagination loses its identity, the imagination needs to decreate itself to 'go back to recover the world'. Not only Stevens but also the Romantic poets feel nostalgia for what is not recaptured through imagination. There seems to be a difference in nostalgic nature between Stevens and the Romantic poets; the former feels nostalgia for reality from which the imagination begins to separate, the latter poets lament the loss of the presence they desire. Though there is a difference between reality and the visionary presence they desire, for both Stevens and the Romantics what they feel as nostalgic is the source for poetic creativity. Therefore what they search for is different in its nature but the same in their effort to fill the gap between what they desire and how they put it into words. This is why Stevens can be said to be a Romantic poet in the modern age.

The reality to which Stevens desires to return is not a gentle one represented as the 'mauve / *Maman*' but an 'unsubjugated' and a wild one. The image of conception in 'a return to birth, a being born / Again in the savagest severity' also suggests that the violent imagination is conceived through a savage reality. The child born from 'a mother fierce' is the imagination rivalling savage reality: 'the child of a mother fierce / In his body, fiercer in his mind'. 'The softest / Woman with a vague moustache' gives us an impression that she undergoes defeminization and shows the incarnation of a savage reality: 'Because she is as she was, reality, / The gross, the fecund'. A savage nature would make itself strong enough to be indifferent to pain. And the poet who touches the 'impersonal pain' of nature may get a kind of enlightenment, a sense that he is also part of 'innocent' nature, to which pain is indifferent. But it is difficult for us to be indifferent to pain as nature is. 'Life is a bitter aspic' (*CP*, 322).

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[62] Bloom 132. The quoted lines from Letters of Wallace Stevens show Stevens's comments on stanza XXVI of 'The Man with the Blue Guitar'.
[63] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 364.

The problem is how to compromise with life which is filled with pain and evil. Under such an unfavourable circumstance, we can say that we are 'Natives of poverty, children of malheur' (*CP*, 322). As we have seen in 'Sunday Morning', we live in an 'island solitude, unsponsored, free, / Of that wide water, inescapable' (*CP*, 70), and we must accept bitterness and poverty from which we cannot escape. Under such hard circumstances the poet can rely on nothing but poetry, through which he can achieve reconciliation with negative things. The poet's belief in poetry is declared with a tone of defiance, 'The gaiety of language is our seigneur' (*CP*, 322), which echoes 'Poetry is the gaiety (joy) of language'[64]. This celebrating image of poetry develops to 'It Must Give Pleasure' in 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction'.

In the concluding stanza, the interdependence between poetry and life is sonorously sung, transmuting the pathos of life into a psalm of life.

> The greatest poverty is not to live
> In a physical world, to feel that one's desire
> Is too difficult to tell from despair. Perhaps,
> After death, the non-physical people, in paradise,
> Itself non-physical, may, by chance, observe
> The green corn gleaming and experience
> The minor of what we feel. The adventurer
> In humanity has not conceived of a race
> Completely physical in a physical world.
> The green corn gleams and the metaphysicals
> Lie sprawling in majors of the August heat,
> The rotund emotions, paradise unknown.
> This is the thesis scrivened in delight,
> The reverberating psalm, the right chorale.

[64] Stevens, 'Adagia' in Opus Posthumous 199

One might have thought of sight, but who could think
Of what it sees, for all the ill it sees?
Speech found the ear, for all the evil sound,
But the dark italics it could not propound.
And out of what one sees and hears and out
Of what one feels, who could have thought to make
So many selves, so many sensuous worlds,
As if the air, the mid-day air, was swarming
With the metaphysical changes that occur,
Merely in living as and where we live. (*CP*, 325-26)

'Poverty' is used by Stevens to mean the 'absence of a fruitful union between imagination and reality'[65] or, as we noted at the beginning of this chapter, the condition of modern man without certainty that God will satisfy our need. However, here the meaning of 'poverty' is quite different: 'The greatest poverty is not to live / In a physical world'. The totally affirmative view of the physical world is also supported by the 'non-physical people, in paradise, / Itself non-physical' who find out a 'paradise unknown' on the gleaming beauty of the earth assuming the 'metaphysical'. According to Kermode, 'the dead of an imaginary paradise are called down . . . to support the thesis that only in the sense of the wholeness and completeness of life, which includes pain, can paradise be found'.[66] The Wordsworth-like celebration of the given is shared by Stevens.[67] The totally affirmative view of life is gained through the working of the imagination by which we can reconcile with reality. The final lines show that the working of the imagination metamorphoses the physical world into the earthly paradise. The poet's belief in the power of imagination is enhanced by suppressing the question mark at the end. Stevens says, 'The last poem ought to end with an interrogation mark, I suppose, but I have punctuated it in such a way as to indicate an abandonment of the question, because I cannot bring myself to end the thing with

[65] Kermode 25.
[66] Kermode 105.
[67] On this subject, see Chapter 1, 26.

an interrogation mark'.[68] Bornstein comments as follows:

> Abandoning the question makes the construction seem more real as it goes along; so, too, does following "as if" with "was" rather than "were". The last three lines are a conditional illustrating a question but seem to be a conjuring up of an independently existing air swarming with metaphysical changes.[69]

Reality transformed through the imagination enriches our life, making 'so many selves, so many sensuous worlds', giving us the sense of the 'metaphysical changes'. And the song dedicated to the earthly paradise sounds as the 'reverberating psalm, the right chorale'.

The reconciliation between the realities of life and the dreams of poetry in 'Esthétique du Mal' shows that Stevens's imagination develops, overcoming the conflict associated with the 'reality-imagination complex'. To embody this Stevens explores a new literary mode. The acknowledgement of reality as a continual shaping produces a corresponding literary mode: by continuously making ever-new poetic creativity, the product of the imagination does not become stale. To sustain the never-ending cycle of the creative imagination according to the living world, an artistic process of creation and decreation is required. Stevens's new Romanticism lies in this literary mode which shows endlessly energetic activity and makes Stevens's poetic imagination vigorous. The ever-changing creation becomes the foundation of the principles of 'It Must be Abstract' and 'It Must Change' in 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction'.

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[68] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 469.
[69] Bornstein 207.

Chapter 6: The Never-Ending Creativity of Fiction

Deeply influenced by, yet in some ways at odds with, the Romantics and their emphasis on the imagination, Stevens developed his thoughts on the imagination by giving a double meaning (one negative, one positive) to the word 'romantic'. Stevens contrasts the Romantic imagination with what the imagination should be in The Necessary Angel. The form of imagination which is highly valued by Stevens as 'the only genius' is 'intrepid and eager and the extreme of its achievement lies in abstraction. The achievement of the romantic, on the contrary, lies in minor wish-fulfillments and it is incapable of abstraction'.[1] Owing to the vulnerable nature of the Romantic imagination, the problem of usurpation by imagination or reality occurs: the failure of the imagination in adhering to reality invites solipsism; the imagination which lacks vitality cannot press back the pressure of reality. From the weak imagination which cannot adhere to the living world, the freshness and pureness of poetry which Stevens considers as essential for the authentically Romantic is not born. In 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction' these thoughts about his new Romanticism are shaped into three principles, 'It Must Be Abstract', 'It Must Change' and 'It Must Give Pleasure'. These three principles provide the conditions for what Stevens calls a supreme fiction.

To create a fiction, it is essential to begin with abstraction. Stevens believes in the power of the imagination to abstract reality so as to create fiction. As in abstract painting, reality is reduced to the elemental structures out of which appearances are made. Like the artists he re-arranges reality so that it reappears through the simultaneous intuition of different images. Stevens refers to abstraction in 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words'.

> . . . his own measure as a poet, in spite of all the passions of all the lovers of the truth, is the measure of his power to abstract himself, and to withdraw with him into his abstraction the reality on which the lovers of truth insist. He must be able to abstract himself and also to abstract

[1] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 139.

> reality, which he does by placing it in his imagination.[2]

A poet must first commit himself to the abstraction of reality from all the human meanings accumulated through literary history. He must do so in order to behold reality without any false preconceptions. However, the paradox which troubles Stevens is his doubt about the possibility of 'abstraction'. Stevens explains the abstract in a letter in which he answers an editor's questions about 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction',

> The abstract does not exist, but it is certainly as immanent: that is to say, the fictive abstract is as immanent in the mind of the poet, as the idea of God is immanent in the mind of the theologian. The poem is a struggle with the inaccessibility of the abstract.[3]

In the previous chapter poems were discussed in which images abstracted from reality did not correspond with what the poet perceived. Acknowledgement of the difficulty of matching abstracted images with an ever-changing reality occurs in section XV of 'The Man with the Blue Guitar' when Stevens asks, 'Is this picture of Picasso's, this "hoard / Of destructions", a picture of ourselves, / Now, an image of our society? (*CP*, 173)'. James Longenbach remarks,

> If the supreme fiction is abstract, in other words, it is unrepresentable; yet in order to be talked about, it must assume a representable shape. . . . In "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" Stevens was able to find a way to explain (as he could not in "Owl's Clover") that the impossibility of sustaining the imperative "it must be abstract" is not a failure to be overcome but a dialectic to be embraced . . .[4]

Despite his 'struggle with the inaccessibility of the abstract', Stevens strives to achieve what he recognises as well-nigh impossible: an adequate evocation of the abstract. The first part of the poem, 'It Must Be Abstract', begins with the poet's injunction to an 'ephebe' or a young poet, who will be a maker of a supreme fiction,

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[2] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 23.
[3] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 434.
[4] James Longenbach, Wallace Stevens: The Plain Sense of Things (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991) 255.

to 'become an ignorant man again / And see the sun again with an ignorant eye / And see it clearly in the idea of it' (*CP*, 380). Thus the process of abstraction begins with the effort to see what is later called 'the first idea' (*CP*, 381) of naked reality. Before going back to the text, let us examine the subject of 'the first idea' in detail.

The return to 'the first idea' of naked reality involves 'decreation'. Adapting Simone Weil's term, Stevens comments as follows:

> She says that decreation is making pass from the created to the uncreated, but that destruction is making pass from the created to nothingness. Modern reality is a reality of decreation, in which our revelations are not the revelations of belief, but the precious portents of our own powers. The greatest truth we could hope to discover . . . is that man's truth is the final resolution of everything.[5]

By decreating what is created, the poet can attain the bare reality from which he can recreate again. This requires further explanation. It is helpful to have recourse to Mellor's argument since she examines the relation between artistic mode and the ever-changing nature of reality in Romanticism. According to her, the romantic ironist recognised the necessity of decreation. She indicates that Romantic irony lies in the conception of the world as fundamentally chaotic, which is abundantly fertile, always throwing up new forms, new creations. She continues:

> The artist who shares this conception of the universe as chaos must find an aesthetic mode that sustains this ontological reality, this never-ending becoming. Clearly, he cannot merely impose a man-made form or system upon this chaos: that would distort motion into stasis. Instead, the romantic ironist must begin skeptically. He must acknowledge the inevitable limitations of his own finite consciousness and of all man-made structures or myths. But even as he denies the absolute validity of his own perceptions and structuring conceptions of the universe, even as he consciously deconstructs his mystifications of the self and the world, he

[5] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 174-75.

> must affirm and celebrate the process of life by creating new images and ideas. Thus the romantic ironist sustains his participation in a creative process that extends beyond the limits of his own mind. He deconstructs his own texts in the expectation that such deconstruction is a way of keeping in contact with a greater creative power.[6]

The universe, which is forever becoming and is never perfected, is viewed as chaotic. And the never-ending character of universal processes becomes an analogue for an artistic mode. For some Romantics, then, notably Byron in Don Juan, literary structure reflects a chaotic universe. In fact, the literary mode of some Romantics is open-ended in order to avoid a fixed ending. Having ironically acknowledged a fictional world as limited in comparison with the ever-changing universe, the Romantic ironist must engage in the creative process of artistic form that 'simultaneously creates and de-creates itself'.[7] But in contrast, Mellor argues, modern deconstructors 'perform only one half of the romantic-ironic operation, that of skeptical analysis and determination of the limits of human language and consciousness'.[8]

Stevens shares with the Romantics the view of reality as constantly changing, a change which must be acknowledged by and embodied in literary modes of representing reality. This view is expressed thus by Pack: 'Not only must fictions include the concept of change, but they must change themselves in order to be true to the world they would describe'.[9] In his poetry Stevens does not use the framework of myth which Romantic poets tend to rely on, since for Stevens, the

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[6] Mellor 4-5.

[7] Mellor indicates the distinction as follows:

> But the authentic romantic ironist is as filled with enthusiasm as with skepticism. He is as much a romantic as an ironist. Having ironically acknowledged the fictiveness of his own patternings of human experience, he romantically engages in the creative process of life by eagerly constructing new forms, new myths. And these new fictions and self-concepts bear with them the seeds of their own destruction. They too die to give way to new patterns, in a never-ending process that becomes an analogue for life itself. The resultant artistic mode that alone can properly be called romantic irony must therefore be a form or structure that simultaneously creates and de-creates itself. (5)

[8] Mellor 5.

[9] Pack 99.

framework of myth in poetry creates a fixed idea which is inconsistent with the ever-changing world. Besides, poetry must adhere to reality, not myth, as its material: 'Poetry / Exceeding music must take the place / Of empty heaven and its hymns' ('The Man with the Blue Guitar', *CP*, 167). In 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction' the poet's need to adhere to reality is recommended after the advice to the ephebe to decreate his perception and go back to the abstracted reality: 'Never suppose an inventing mind as source / Of this idea nor for that mind compose / A voluminous master folded in his fire' (*CP*, 381). These lines remind us of the two opposite propositions, the solipsistic nature of 'man's intelligence' or the egotistical imagination in 'Nota: man is the intelligence of his soil, / The sovereign ghost' (*CP*, 27) and the denial of it in 'Nota: his soil is man's intelligence. / That's better' (*CP*, 36). We should not suppose that the reality of his mind or the 'first idea' owes its existence to our 'inventing mind' since reality must be dominant over the mind. The instructions to the ephebe recommend the adherence of the imagination to reality. The instructions also implicitly refute Romanticism in the 'pejorative' sense. The same tangle of issues is again treated in the fourth section which begins with an assertion: 'The first idea was not our own' (*CP*, 383). It is because

> . . . The clouds preceded us
>
> There was a muddy centre before we breathed.
> There was a myth before the myth began,
> Venerable and articulate and complete.
>
> From this the poem springs: that we live in a place
> That is not our own and, much more, not ourselves
> And hard it is in spite of blazoned days. (*CP*, 383)

Reality which exists prior to man is the absolute. Thus Stevens repeatedly indicates 'from this [reality] the poem springs'. Though we cannot impose our ideas on reality which exists beyond ourselves, we can abstract our ideas from it and weave them into poetry, as a result of which everyday life is transformed into

'blazoned days'.

Through decreation, reality is reduced into a purely abstracted form: 'How clean the sun when seen in its idea,/ Washed in the remotest cleanliness of a heaven / That has expelled us and our images . . .'(*CP*, 381). To return to the immaculate state without any inventions means, to quote again, to 'become an ignorant man again / And see the sun again with an ignorant eye / And see it clearly in the idea of it'. The Romantic dilemma lies in the acknowledgement that any fictional world will be limited when set against ever-changing reality. Stevens tries to resolve the dilemma by creating an ever-unfinished product which creates and decreates itself. Poetry must incorporate the process of becoming, thus corresponding to the dynamic force operating in reality. As Stevens says, 'Modern reality is a reality of decreation'; it is necessary for his poetry to be decreated in order to have a new poetic creativity. Fiction is created out of this first step of perception by an 'ignorant' man. While Stevens denies the solipsism which can be part of the Romantic imagination, he inherits from the Romantics what is essential to his creativity. It was suggested in the previous chapter that the 'mind of winter' attained through the process of abstraction in 'The Snow Man' could be compared to Keats's 'Negative Capability'.[10] A variation on the theme of 'The Snow Man' can be found in the following lines:

> And not to have is the beginning of desire.
> To have what is not is its ancient cycle.
> It is desire at the end of winter, when
>
> It observes the effortless weather turning blue
> And sees the myosotis on its bush.
> Being virile, it hears the calendar hymn.
>
> It knows that what it has is what is not
> And throws it away like a thing of another time,

[10] See Chapter 3, 101-102.

As morning throws off stale moonlight and shabby sleep. (*CP*, 382)

It is this beginning that will lead to the new cyclic change of season. We can paraphrase as follows: it is beginning or re-imagining that will make poetry something constantly new and avoid the stale representation into which the Romanticists fell.

The poem refreshes life so that we share,
For a moment, the first idea . . . It satisfies
Belief in an immaculate beginning

And sends us, winged by an unconscious will,
To an immaculate end. We move between these points: (*CP*, 382)

The cycle running from creating, the 'immaculate beginning', to decreating, the 'immaculate end' or nothingness for a new creativity, shows an unending round of poetic activity. The constant activity of poetic imagination proves the 'virility' of the poet. By 'being virile' the imagination can come up with fictions that correspond to always changing reality. Therefore the driving force to create a fiction lies in the insatiable desire for unending activity of imagination: 'It knows that what it has is what is not'.

The poet's mind of winter engages in incessant creation and decreation. This is also illustrated by and enacted in 'Man and Bottle' (1940).

The mind is the great poem of winter, the man,
Who, to find what will suffice,
Destroys romantic tenements
Of rose and ice

In the land of war. More than the man, it is
A man with the fury of a race of men,
A light at the centre of many lights,
A man at the centre of men. (*CP*, 238-39)

Riddel says, 'The "man at the centre of men", seeking "what will suffice", is the

poet's self, the central self in whose mind decreation (the "mind destroys") precedes recreation ("what will suffice"). Thus "Man and Bottle", unlike "Anecdote of the Jar", marries artifice and actuality and makes of man the container of the world'.[11] 'To find what will suffice' is to marry or reconcile poetry and reality. However, the reconciliation breaks down momentarily owing to the violence of the imaginative drive to decreate, then recreate. This drive entails a war between imagination and reality, as Stevens implies when he refers to 'the man, / Who, to find what will suffice, / Destroys romantic tenements / Of rose and ice / In the land of war'. It is possible to read this 'war' as metaphorical, as referring to the war between imagination and reality. Stevens argues that the destruction of 'romantic tenements' must be realised not by the usurpation by reality but by the decreating mind: 'It has to persuade that war is part of itself [the mind], / A manner of thinking, a mode / Of destroying, as the mind destroys' (*CP*, 239). In the decreating process the mind fights against being usurped by reality. Baker suggests a Coleridgean echo in the poem: 'he [Stevens] altered Coleridge's "sunny pleasure dome with caves of ice" into his own "romantic tenements of rose and ice", with a hint that, like Kubla's, they were fated for destruction'.[12] And when Stevens says, 'The poem lashes more fiercely than the wind' (*CP*, 239), we may recall the destructive wind in Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind'. However, what Stevens requires for poetic creativity is a powerful imagination in himself, by which he can overcome destruction and discover a new poetic creativity.

Stevens's dynamism shows in the way he dramatises the war between imagination and reality. In 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction' against the severe reality surrounding the poet, the battle is fought by wild animals which represents violent imagination: 'The lion roars at the enraging desert. / . . . The elephant / Breaches the darkness of Ceylon with blares, / . . . The bear, / The ponderous cinnamon, snarls in his mountain' (*CP*, 384). Against the violent reality the poet must place the violent imagination: 'You lie / In silence upon your bed. You clutch

[11] Riddel 158.
[12] Baker 17-18.

the corner / Of the pillow in your hand. You writhe and press / A bitter utterance from your writhing, dumb,/ Yet voluble dumb violence' (*CP*, 384). The poet, who is struggling to produce words to create poetry, is represented as if he were writhing and pressing like a beast against the iron gaol of reality in which he is imprisoned. Therefore the poet, who fights against violent reality to work out a compromise between imagination and reality, assumes the image of the hero. The adherence to reality in order to create fiction, whose process is never-ending, entails continuous conflict that only the virile and heroic poet can survive: 'These are the heroic children whom time breeds / Against the first idea' (*CP*, 385). This metaphorical war is what gives life and imaginative energy to Stevens's poetry. And the poet must become the supreme ruler of this metaphorical war in order to create a new Romanticism.

Abstracting 'the first idea', however, is difficult to realise. As we observed at the beginning of this chapter, Stevens himself indicates that 'The poem is a struggle with the inaccessibility of the abstract'.

> My house has changed a little in the sun.
> The fragrance of the magnolias comes close,
> False flick, false form, but falseness close to kin.
>
> It must be visible or invisible,
> Invisible or visible or both:
> A seeing and unseeing in the eye.
>
> The weather and the giant of the weather,
> Say the weather, the mere weather, the mere air:
> An abstraction blooded, as a man by thought. (*CP*, 385)

What the poet represents in fiction becomes different from what he has in his mind as 'the first idea'. Relevant to this remark is that the difficulty of incarnation of poetic truth was overcome in 'To the One of Fictive Music' by accepting the inevitable fate of the imagination. And the poet shows the same

acknowledgement here: poetry's necessary falsification must be defended.

Added to this, the poet questions the validity of fiction which entails another paradox that 'It must be visible or invisible, / Invisible or visible or both'. While the mind's image of the real is visible, it is invisible or 'unseeing in the eye'. The ability or the inability of the image to become a substitute for what is real is an unending struggle of the poetic imagination. The co-existence of the visible and the invisible which the natural world rejects as paradoxical is explored by Stevens. The paradoxical conception is Stevens's great concern since the means of reconciling the two terms lies in fiction. When the perception of reality is transformed into fiction, the problem of false representation is brought about. Fiction, owing to its falseness, cannot take the place of reality and yet it remains akin to it. It is for this self-aware fictiveness that poetry's necessary falsification should be valued. Fiction and reality are apparently contradictory but have an inseparable relationship, nourishing each other: fiction, which is nourished on reality, reciprocates the benefit by means of fictive transformation. Though the fiction is an invisible product of the imagination, it becomes visible in the mind's reality through the human experience of fiction. We might remember a phrase from 'Another Weeping Woman', 'the one reality / In this imagined world'. The world of poetry created by the imagination turns into the mind's own reality. It is because, to quote Doggett's words, 'The transfusion by life or blood takes place in Stevens' poem, where our environment, our weather, our mere air becomes what it is in our human realization of it. Therefore, the scene of our lives is "an abstraction blooded as a man by thought"'.[13] This is also reflected in the poet's assertion, 'The first idea is an imagined thing' (*CP*, 387).

The problem is how the paradox should be overcome in language and imagery.

> The first idea is an imagined thing.
> The pensive giant prone in violet space
> May be the MacCullough, an expedient,

[13] Doggett, Stevens's Poetry of Thought 111-12.

Logos and logic, crystal hypothesis,
Incipit and a form to speak the word
And every latent double in the word,

Beau linguist. But the MacCullough is MacCullough.
It does not follow that major man is man.
If MacCullough himself lay lounging by the sea,

Drowned in its washes, reading in the sound,
About the thinker of the first idea,
He might take habit, whether from wave or phrase,

Or power of the wave, or deepened speech,
Or a leaner being, moving in on him,
Of greater aptitude and apprehension,

As if the waves at last were never broken,
As if the language suddenly, with ease,
Said things it had laboriously spoken. (*CP*, 387)

Stevens himself interprets these lines as follows:

> The gist of this poem is that the MacCullough is MacCullough; MacCullough is any name, any man. The trouble with humanism is that man as God remains man, but there is an extension of man, the leaner being, in fiction, a possibly more than human human, a composite human. The act of recognizing him is the act of this leaner being moving in on us.[14]

In Stevens's gloss, 'the MacCullough is MacCullough; MacCullough is any name, any man', the movement from 'MacCullough' to 'any name, any man' suggests a process of abstraction. We should remember that Stevens's solution for epistemological problems is hinted at by Shelley's comment in 'A Defence of

[14] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 434.

Poetry': 'It [Poetry] is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge'. Stevens acknowledges that the poetic logos cannot be defined by a particular image; instead, the image needs to be extended to meet peripheral and approximate representations of his perception. By avoiding a definitive description, the poet explores the possibility of representing in new ways what he perceives. The 'leaner being' also can be interpreted metaphorically as the first idea unadorned by previous fictions in contrast with the saturated imagination represented as 'fat Jocundus' in 'The Glass of Water'. Weston regards the quest of the poem as 'a marriage of self and world which overcomes the self as Logos in the very act of speaking'.[15] According to her explanation,

> The acutest speech that Stevens has been hunting since *Harmonium* here seems close to realization. It is not that a great thick voice will speak out of clouds, but the MacCullough, recognizing something *in himself* that might be bigger than he is, approaches speech. In him is the Logos and logic; in him alone the voice that can speak.[16]

I agree with Weston's emphasis on the Logos. However, the poet who senses the 'struggle with the inaccessibility of the abstract' invokes the 'leaner being' of the first idea by tentatively repeating 'as if': 'As if the waves at last were never broken, / As if the language suddenly, with ease, / Said things it had laboriously spoken'. What is desired here is 'the blissful liaison, / Between himself and his environment' (*CP*, 34) which Crispin in 'The Comedian as the Letter C', confronting the sea, failed to have.

Riddel argues that MacCullough's significance is that 'he can imagine at all, that is, can create'. This turns into 'a discovery through language of the reality that is in man – his possibility as creator'.[17] Riddel's argument enables us to witness the growth of Stevens's hero from an ephebe of the relation between imagination and reality to the major man who creates a supreme fiction. In the concluding stanza of 'It Must Be Abstract' the hero as the major man is

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[15] Weston 87.
[16] Weston 94-95.
[17] Riddel 173.

characterised as follows:

> The major abstraction is the idea of man
> And major man is its exponent, abler
> In the abstract than in his singular,
>
> More fecund as principle than particle,
> Happy fecundity, flor-abundant force,
> In being more than an exception, part,
>
> Though a heroic part, of the commonal.
> The major abstraction is the commonal,
> The inanimate, difficult visage. (*CP*, 388)

In a different context Kermode also regards the fiction-maker as a hero: 'The poet, deeply concerned with the abstract, is deeply involved in "the idea of man", man considered as the fiction-maker, the giver of order. This man is the heart of poetry in our time'.[18] As a prelude to 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction', Kermode examines Stevens's hero.

> The man who can put together the parts of the world and make what suffices is major man, the modern god. He is really a way of speaking of the imagination in a world where God no longer works. "Man must become the hero of his world" ['Montrachet-le-Jardin', *CP*, 261]; his union with reality is an act of his mind. Thus the hero *is* all men, and lives in their poverty, as he himself says in "Idiom of the Hero": (*C.P.*, p.201) "I am the poorest of all".[19]

Though the hero is comically costumed to indicate his lack of any special position, 'In that old coat, those sagging pantaloons' (*CP*, 389), he can transform reality through the imagination and overcome the struggle between the two. 'It Must be Abstract' ends by suggesting that the 'major man' as the idea's 'exponent' confects

[18] Kermode 70-71.
[19] Kermode 74.

the 'final elegance' from ordinary things: 'It is of him, ephebe, to make, to confect / The final elegance, not to console / Nor sanctify, but plainly to propound' (*CP*, 389). Since the word 'confect' suggests making elaborate sweet things, the process of creating the 'final elegance' from ordinary things invites a laugh as well as a surprise. Stevens's hero is never a powerful, superman-like hero but a Crispin, a comical and unheroic explorer. This is because the poet works in a quotidian reality. However, by giving the poet the title of the 'major man', his poetic role of creating a fiction which can be 'life's redemption' re-emerges as heroic. On creating a supreme fiction, 'sitting at the feet of the familiar requires more effort than rising to the heights of the extraordinary'.[20] And the achievement promises a new genre of poetry. Stevens desires this new kind of poetry in 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction'. Thus Stevens is appealing for a truly American poetry that is composed by the major man as the representative of the mass of ordinary people.

The middle section, 'It Must Change', builds a bridge between 'It Must Be Abstract' and 'It Must Give Pleasure', showing that poetry as an artistic mode needs to correspond to ever-changing reality. The liberation of modern art from an outworn Romantic tradition is searched for through Stevens's new Romanticism, highly dependent on the poetic technique of abstraction. Let us now look at the necessity of the liberated mode before turning to 'It Must Change'. On receiving the National Book Award for Poetry in 1951, Stevens remarked:

> I have just used the words "a modern poet". These words are intended to mean nothing more than a poet of the present time. . . . I think it may be said that he considers his function to be this: to find, by means of his own thought and feeling, what seems to him to be the poetry of his time as differentiated from the poetry of the time of Sir Walter Scott, or the poetry of any other time, and to state it in a manner that effectively discloses it to his readers.[21]

What makes poetry modern is represented well in 'Of Modern Poetry' (1942)

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[20] Longenbach 264.

[21] Stevens, Opus Posthumous 254.

whose content is very close to its preceding poem, 'Man and Bottle'. By comparing the mind to a theatre, Stevens tells us of the necessity of a new theatre for modern poetry and shows how mental action should be performed:

> The poem of the mind in the act of finding
> What will suffice. It has not always had
> To find: the scene was set; it repeated what
> Was in the script.
>
> Then the theatre was changed
> To something else. Its past was a souvenir.
> It has to be living, to learn the speech of the place.
> It has to face the men of the time and to meet
> The women of the time. It has to think about war
> And it has to find what will suffice. It has
> To construct a new stage. (*CP*, 239-40)

The modern theatre for Stevens is a purely abstracted reality from which a new poetic creativity begins. The emphasis on 'finding' calls attention to mental process, engaged in a continuous 'finding' in order to cope with outer reality and 'find what will suffice'. Riddel suggests,

> Everything in Stevens comes at last to the "act", to the continual process of adjusting the mind to its time-space matrix, a reality it could qualify, even psychologically create, but could not transcend. Continuous creation is a mental act; it may issue in images or metaphors or even poems, but the reality itself is process.[22]

To correspond to ever-changing reality the poem has the form of an ever-changing and unfinished product, and embodies a process of continuous exchange between imagination and reality. Relevant here, as observed in the preceding chapter, is Bornstein's discussion of Stevens's 'provisionality'. Bornstein's view has much in common with that of Doggett who describes how,

> In this poem the older theater with its set scenes and its well-known play

[22] Riddel 273.

> is changed to the modern theater of improvisation. The two theaters thus represent the older mind that conceives of the world as a defined and given external and the modern mind that has a sense of the imagined world and must continually improvise "what will suffice".[23]

Though the older mind was satisfied with the traditional order ('the scene was set; it repeated what / Was in the script'), the modern mind without any established script has to improvise fiction from living experience: 'It has to be living, to learn the speech of the place. / It has to face the men of the time and to meet / The women of the time'. Since the script for modern poetry needs to be adequate to an outer reality which is new and altering, the poet can prevent the fiction from becoming stale by continually improvising 'what will suffice'. Therefore, 'improvisation' allied to 'provisionality' ensures that the poem is not fixed but moves and forms itself continuously.

Bornstein, by using the term, 'provisionality', indicates a poetic nature which is peculiar to Stevens. We should remember that any such harmonious union is likely to be provisional.[24] After pointing out that Stevens's distrust of language for its being 'inherently falsified, if not by initial distortion then by permanent codification' drives him towards 'provisionality as the only viable poetic strategy', Bornstein continues:

> The true purpose of his endless conditionals, interrogatives, and syntactic legerdemain is to remind us continually that his poetic fictions are only fictions and to prevent them from fixing what must never be fixed. Poetry can only exist "in the intricate evasions of as". (*CP*, 486)
>
> The continuous constructions and destructions of provisionality demanded such enormous inputs of energy that Stevens came to exalt the necessary violence of imagination.[25]

The issues indicated by Bornstein are threefold: the linguistic dilemma involved in transposing ever-changing reality into fixed language, the provisionality of poetry

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[23] Doggett, Stevens' Poetry of Thought 64n-65n.
[24] See Chapter 5, 196.
[25] Bornstein, Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens 190.

as the only clue to the dilemma, and the necessary violence of imagination needed to keep alive a sense of creative provisionality. Provisionality through continuous abstraction is Stevens's poetic strategy, a strategy succinctly described in the section-title 'It Must Change'. Bornstein reveals how Stevens's transformation of Romanticism into a new Romanticism entails the provisionality of poetry. Stevens looks less for a finished product than for a continuous poetic quest. By allowing ongoing process to both poetry and reality, Stevens tries to realise momentary harmonies between the two.

Ongoing process results in continuing oppositions and unions:

> Two things of opposite natures seem to depend
> On one another, as a man depends
> On a woman, day on night, the imagined
>
> On the real. This is the origin of change.
> Winter and spring, cold copulars, embrace
> And forth the particulars of rapture come. (*CP*, 392)

The Romantic attempt to reconcile or synthesise what is divided, opposed and conflicting is realised by accepting the world as a system of dynamic opposites. In a quasi-Blakean way, opposition is regarded as necessary, something without which there is no progression: 'Two things of opposite natures seem to depend / . . . This is the origin of change.' And through the embrace of 'the imagined' and 'the real', 'the particulars of rapture' come forth. This blissful moment, which will be the subject of 'It Must Give Pleasure', is retold in an allegorical episode.

> On her trip around the world, Nanzia Nunzio
> Confronted Ozymandias. . . .
>
> I am the woman stripped more nakedly
> Than nakedness, standing before an inflexible
> Order, saying I am the contemplated spouse.

Speak to me that, which spoken, will array me
In its own only precious ornament.
Set on me the spirit's diamond coronal.

Clothe me entire in the final filament,
So that I tremble with such love so known
And myself am precious for your perfecting.

Then Ozymandias said the spouse, the bride
Is never naked. A fictive covering
Weaves always glistening from the heart and mind. (*CP*, 395-96)

It is helpful here to quote Bornstein's explanation of these lines.

> Shelley's sonnet used Ozymandias to demonstrate the change of life and longevity of art, with the ruins of Ozymandias' statue being the only survival of his vanished reign. As though developing the cycle implicit in the decay of the statue, Stevens upholds instead the necessary change of art. Nanzia Nunzio strips off her garments to encounter Ozymandias' "inflexible / Order" directly. (*CP* 396) He replies that the bride can never be naked, for "A fictive covering / Weaves always glistening from the heart and mind." The metaphor itself brilliantly transforms Shelley's image of the veil separating us from permanence and the One into a fictive garment allowing for saving change and diversity. Nanzia Nunzio herself is a Romantic Image manqué. The mind can never apprehend her nakedly, but only through the continuously changing fictions it continuously creates. The poem has acted out its own doctrine by providing the image of Ozymandias himself with a new fictive covering.[26]

The ruined statue of Ozymandias which cannot sustain the longevity of art becomes a symbol of the deadlock of Romanticism. Stevens breaks it 'through the continuously changing fictions it [the mind] continuously creates'. We can also

[26] Bornstein, Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens 223.

guess that, as Bornstein suggests, the poem has acted out its own doctrine by replacing the Romantic regarded in a pejorative sense with a new Romanticism. 'An inflexible / Order' of Ozymandias which, owing to the change of life, is reduced to ruins and thus suggests an allegory of the Romantic in a pejorative sense. Nanzia Nunzio is represented as the imagined. Therefore not to be reduced to ruins like Ozymandias, she strips herself 'more nakedly / Than nakedness'. To become the bride of changing reality, she demands that she should be always clothed in new garments. Ozymandias's reply is that 'the bride / Is never naked'. The point of the episode about the encounter of the Romantic and the modern is the realisation of a new Romanticism. By making Ozymandias admit the need for adherence to reality, Stevens rescues the Romantic in a pejorative sense. Thus the marriage of the real and the imagined occurs through the progressive metamorphosis of reality: 'A fictive covering / Weaves always glistening from the heart and mind'.

Though the momentary harmony is realised, what haunts Stevens is that, as Bloom suggests, 'the fearful question every poet in the Romantic tradition is compelled to ask: "Does the poet / Evade us, as in a senseless element?" The true Romantic Agony is the fear of solipsism'.[27]

> Is there a poem that never reaches words
>
> And one that chaffers the time away?
> Is the poem both peculiar and general?
> There's a meditation there, in which there seems
>
> To be an evasion, a thing not apprehended or
> Not apprehended well. Does the poet
> Evade us, as in a senseless element? (*CP*, 396)

There is a doubt whether the supreme fiction may be reached in ever-changing

[27] Harold Bloom, 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction: A Commentary', in Wallace Stevens: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Marie Borroff (Eaglewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963) 87.

reality. Owing to his constant sense of conflict between the thing and his description of the thing, after achieving a momentary harmony, Stevens experiences a loss of confidence. But in acknowledging the cleavage between what is imagined and reality, he regathers force and defies the gap with his notion of possibility.

> It is the gibberish of the vulgate that he seeks.
> He tries by a peculiar speech to speak
>
> The peculiar potency of the general,
> To compound the imagination's Latin with
> The lingua franca et jocundissima. (*CP*, 397)

The poet's defiant attitude taken towards this linguistic problem is reflected in exaggerated expressions such as 'the gibberish of the vulgate' and 'the lingua franca et jocundissima'. The words of 'a poem that never reaches words' might sound like 'the gibberish of the vulgate'. However, it is the 'peculiar speech' that is sought by Stevens who seeks through the 'potency' of words to blend the 'general' with the particular, tradition with the individual talent, reality with imagination.

Thus vacillating between supreme fiction and reality, Stevens investigates the possibility that his own fictions provide him with the best clue as to the nature of reality. And the concluding section of 'It Must Change' celebrates the poet's 'will to change' (*CP*, 397), which recalls Shelley's 'west wind' in its wish to transform the world: 'The west wind was the music, the motion, the force / To which the swans curveted, a will to change, / A will to make iris frettings on the blank' (*CP*, 397). The section ends confidently:

> . . . The freshness of transformation is
>
> The freshness of a world. It is our own,
> It is ourselves, the freshness of ourselves,
> And that necessity and that presentation

Are rubbings of a glass in which we peer.
Of these beginnings, gay and green, propose
The suitable amours. Time will write them down. (*CP*, 397-98)

The repeated use of 'freshness' sounds like emphasising the necessary condition for poetry. To give a 'sense of the freshness or vividness of life'[28] is what Stevens desires for his poetry. However, Regueiro indicates, 'the problem with most of Stevens' longer poems is that they theorize about themselves without providing an enactment of their project'[29]. This is simply not the case. Through the 'potency' of his rhythms, images and diction, Stevens succeeds in embodying his theory in his practice. This can be witnessed everywhere in Stevens's poetry. To sustain the freshness of poetry, Stevens constantly repeats the process of creation and decreation in his poetry, and we recall how the marriage of the two opposing images is effected through a duet in 'The Man with the Blue Guitar' (*CP*, 177).

Overcoming the antithesis of imagination and reality, Stevens reconciles the two. The pleasure given through this reconciliation guarantees Stevens's theory of poetry which is also 'the theory of life'. This is demonstrated in the final section, 'It Must Give Pleasure', that opens with the contrast between the 'jubilas at exact, accustomed times' (*CP*, 398), whose religious pleasure sounds obsolete to the modern mind and an epiphanic encounter or a new discovery in our present circumstances through fiction. Pleasure given by fiction shows a new revelation of reality creating a blissful contact with it.

But the difficultest rigor is forthwith,
On the image of what we see, to catch from that

Irrational moment its unreasoning,
As when the sun comes rising, when the sea
Clears deeply, when the moon hangs on the wall

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[28] Stevens, Opus Posthumous 184.
[29] Regueiro 201.

Of heaven-haven. These are not things transformed.
Yet we are shaken by them as if they were.
We reason about them with a later reason. (*CP*, 398-99)

In 'Adagia' Stevens says, 'Poetry must be irrational'[30] and also mentions that 'the irrational element in poetry is the transaction between reality and the sensibility of the poet from which poetry springs'.[31] The fiction gives us the 'irrational moment' which cannot be explained by reason. We are shaken by the 'irrational' or epiphanic moment when reality assumes a completely different aspect as if it were really transformed. The section proceeds to show how the 'irrational moment' contributes to the pleasure of fiction.

The nothingness was a nakedness, a point

Beyond which thought could not progress as thought.
He had to choose. But it was not a choice
Between excluding things. It was not a choice

Between, but of. He chose to include the things
That in each other are included, the whole,
The complicate, the amassing harmony. (*CP*, 403)

As Doggett suggests, 'the modern mind . . . must continually improvise "what will suffice"'; a fiction must be created from the abstracted reality or the nothingness of reality deprived of all fictions: 'the real, / To be stripped of every fiction except one, / The fiction of an absolute' (*CP*, 404). Though it may be an impossible task, 'It is possible, possible, possible. It must / Be possible' (CP, 404). The repeated uses of 'possible' and 'must' sound as if the poet seeks to convince himself. And he must believe the possibility since for the beginning of a new creative cycle it is necessary to choose, or abstract, and to translate elements from reality into an ordered fictive 'mundo'. With the acknowledgement of the fact that 'two things of opposite

[30] Stevens, Opus Posthumous 188.
[31] Stevens, 'The Irrational Element in Poetry' in Opus Posthumous 224.

natures seem to depend / On one another' (*CP*, 392), abstraction can function in a wholly inclusive way, inviting 'the amassing harmony'. Coleridge's conception of the imagination as a synthetic power is realised in an idealised way. To accept the negative aspects of life is essential for a supreme fiction; otherwise the fiction would become false in a pejorative sense. In Pack's words, 'In the ultimate order, everything partakes of everything else; there is no disunity, all becomes part of the One, the unifying whole that reconciles all opposites and brings all things together in felicitous relationship'.[32]

In the last section, by addressing the earth as 'Fat girl, terrestrial', Stevens hymns the fecund image of the earth, thus demonstrating 'a pleasure of agreement with the radiant and productive world in which he [the poet] lives'.[33] The poet, who can no longer find nourishment in stale modes of religious joy, regards his supreme fiction as the most suitable mode for modern times. The marriage between imagination and reality through a supreme fiction gives us a new discovery of reality, which is a significant and pleasurable experience in the modern world where the mind in conjunction with reality can be relied on as the fulfilment of spiritual need.

> Fat girl, terrestrial, my summer, my night,
> How is it I find you in difference, see you there
> In a moving contour, a change not quite completed?
>
> . . . . . .
>
> You remain the more than natural figure. You
> Become the soft-footed phantom, the irrational
>
> Distortion, however fragrant, however dear.
> That's it: the more than rational distortion,
> The fiction that results from feeling. Yes, that.

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[32] Pack 104.
[33] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 57.

They will get it straight one day at the Sorbonne.
We shall return at twilight from the lecture
Pleased that the irrational is rational,

Until flicked by feeling, in a gildered street,
I call you by name, my green, my fluent mundo.
You will have stopped revolving except in crystal. (*CP*, 406-07)

In Stevens's terrestrial song in America the humble and humorous representation of the image of woman is preferred, rather than a mythological figure. The personified earth as 'fat girl', in ever-changing reality, is simultaneously itself and something other. The progressive metamorphoses of reality which our minds create reflect the way that the world is governed by change. However, the cost of the metamorphoses is 'the irrational distortion' of natural appearances. Between the imagined and the real, a cleavage always exists. This view is implied by Doggett in his gloss: 'The world in idea, the invented world, is the fiction that results from feeling and, thus, the irrational distortion'.[34] And the 'irrational distortion' brought by the fiction brings about a fortuitous meeting with reality, enriching its meeting. The repeated uses of 'feeling' work as a key indication of the coming and arrival of enlightenment. The first 'feeling' shows a loving feeling on the poet's part towards his muse in creating poetry or the fiction, as we also witnessed in 'Peter Quince at the Clavier'. The second 'feeling' shows a strong emotion felt at the intense moment of union of the imagination and reality, which was also described in the words 'we are shaken by them as if they were' (*CP*, 399). This Wordsworthian tone is described in 'The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet', 'The pleasure is the pleasure of powers that create a truth that cannot be arrived at by the reason alone, a truth that the poet recognizes by sensation'.[35] Such emotional experience enriches the intense but fleeting moment which the poet

[34] Doggett, Stevens' Poetry of Thought 118.
[35] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 58.

treasures as the truth of reality.

Stevens, who perceives that 'This reality is, also, the momentous world of poetry'[36], comes to be satisfied with a momentary union in the fleeting world. This satisfaction is described in the last line, 'I call you by name, my green, my fluent mundo. / You will have stopped revolving except in crystal' (*CP*, 407). As for the meaning of 'crystal', we have to go back to the prologue:

> And for what, except for you, do I feel love?
> Do I press the extremest book of the wisest man
> Close to me, hidden in me day and night?
> In the uncertain light of single, certain truth,
> Equal in living changingness to the light
> In which I meet you, in which we sit at rest,
> For a moment in the central of our being,
> The vivid transparence that you bring is peace. (*CP*, 380)

By dedicating this short piece to his muse, the poet tries to invoke her to write the poem. In order to understand the 'vivid transparence' we may have recourse to Ralph Waldo Emerson when he speaks in Nature, Addresses and Lectures of the relationship between man and nature: 'all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God'.[37] There is a Snow Man-like approach to oneness with nature in Emerson's assertion. The 'transparent' view of nature without any egotism is required to feel the presence of God, which reminds us of Wordsworth's 'wise passiveness' in communion with nature. When the necessity of a 'transparent' view of nature is taken up by Stevens, his 'vivid transparence' means a purely abstracted reality where a fiction can be created. This echoes the transparence of 'crystal' which has become a poetic space for the improvisation of fiction. In the transparency of a poetic space as a purely abstracted reality, a fiction is improvised and the sequence of images revolves

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[36] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 174.
[37] Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature, Addresses and Lectures (1883; Honolulu, Hawaii: UP of the Pacific 2001) 16.

endlessly. This very same image could be found in 'The Glass of Water': 'in the water [as the transparent space for poetic activity revolving images are compared to that] winding weeds move round'. Naming the personified earth, 'Fat girl, terrestrial' or 'my green, my fluent mundo', shows the union of the fertile earth and the fictive world which is 'fluent' or flows easily according to the external world. And the union is strengthened by the possessive pronouns, the 'my's, showing Stevens's confidence in his new Romanticism.

Once the reconciliation is realised, the poetic space is reduced to a battlefield of the mind.

> Soldier, there is a war between the mind
> And sky, between thought and day and night. It is
> For that the poet is always in the sun,
>
> Patches the moon together in his room
> To his Virgilian cadences, up down,
> Up down. It is a war that never ends. (*CP*, 407)

Longenbach discusses the coda to 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction' within the context of the Second World War, but he concludes his discussion thus:

> Published in *Transport to Summer* after the war was over, "Notes" does not seem to be the same wartime sequence it was designed to be in 1942 (just as Abstract Expressionist paintings would eventually not seem part of a struggle over nationalist propaganda). But after Stevens achieves the willing repetition of days that is his peace, after the final cantos extol the ordinary beauties of a bird's song and a summer night, the coda to "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" reminds us that there is a war that never ends; it suggests that those beauties, however arduously achieved, might lull us into an arrested peace or might allow us to forget. This is something of which Stevens himself sometimes needed to be reminded during the final postwar years of his life. And if the coda to "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" remains at odds with poems immediately preceding it,

that is because, in a necessary way, it is.[38]

Longenbach's readings enable us to claim a more general validity for the poem. Considering Stevens's poetic space which is created through the endless conflict between imagination and reality, we can also argue that the coda to the fiction shows the energetic battle for a new poetic creativity. And the virile poet who has simultaneously to create and decreate fiction can be compared to a soldier in the war between the imagination and reality.

The cycle of poetic activity demands, to quote Bornstein's words again, 'such enormous inputs of energy that Stevens came to exalt the necessary violence of imagination'. Stevens puts an emphasis on the repeated acts of poetic creation.

> One of the vast repetitions final in
> Themselves and, therefore, good, the going round
>
> And round and round, the merely going round,
> Until merely going round is a final good, (*CP*, 405)

The repeated 'going round's which seem to stress the 'merely going round' give us a sense of doubt that the just repeated creations bring about no 'final good'. However, Stevens suggests that poetic creation must overcome a merely repetitive act 'until merely going round is a final good'. Every time a new fiction is created at the beginning of each new imaginative cycle, it should assume a difference, and show the working of a repetitive but ever-changing imagination; otherwise, it would be a repetition of the same fiction reduced to a stale representation. Therefore the poet who challenges the repetition of the energetic activity of the poetic imagination is 'most master' (*CP*, 406). Pack explains the reason why the hero must be the master of repetition.

> Each repetition is a finite aspect of the infinite phenomenon of creation, so that each repetition is an act of affirmation and of faith. Repetition as metaphor, poem or song is part of the infinite change that returns us to the core of life, and as such is an attempt to know reality by imitatively

[38] Longenbach 273.

> re-creating it. Stevens says that the hero must be the master of repetition, and therefore he will be the poet of reality.[39]

What Pack indicates is very similar to Coleridge's statement in Biographia Literaria: 'The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.' The Coleridgean imagination is absorbed into the thematic structure of Stevens's poetry. Poetic activity is like that of God because the poet as a maker must create fiction from 'the nothingness'. When Stevens says, 'The nothingness was a nakedness, a point, / Beyond which fact could not progress as fact' (*CP*, 402) or 'thought could not progress as thought' (*CP*, 403)[40], we can find this state of nothingness as a purely abstracted reality or a clean slate on which a new poetic creativity is repeated. In this sense the recreation of reality in the mind is the repetition of the act of God, by which the finite mind becomes the 'infinite I AM'. The transcendence of the imagination is equivalent to apotheosis. Stevens says, 'The extreme poet will produce a poem equivalent to the idea of God. The extreme poet will be as concerned with a knowledge of man as people are now concerned with a knowledge of God'.[41] When Stevens is 'Filled with expressible bliss' (*CP*, 404), in 'the amassing harmony', he says, 'I have / No need, am happy, forget need's golden hand, / Am satisfied without solacing majesty, . . . I have not but I am and as I am, I am' (*CP*, 404-5). Unlike Coleridge's capital letters 'I AM', the repeated small 'I am's show godlike self-affirmation in a less immodest way.

After the culmination of poetic activity in 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction' Stevens's strong sense of reality develops and his recognition of the absoluteness of reality causes him to reorder the balance of power between imagination and reality.[42] If Stevens's acknowledgement of the dominance of reality over the

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[39] Pack 111-12.

[40] In a later poem, 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven', the poetic creativity beginning from the nothingness is again mentioned: 'In things seen and unseen, created from nothingness' (*CP*, 486).

[41] Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens 369-70.

[42] On this subject, see Chapter 4, 169-70.

imagination influences his later works, his doubts concerning the validity of the imagination can be witnessed in 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction': 'These external regions, what do we fill them with / Except reflections, the escapades of death,/ Cinderella fulfilling herself beneath the roof?' (*CP*, 405). Against Bloom, who reads in the passage the heroic integration of the self and what is outside the self,[43] Vendler suggests that this integration is ironic; she writes: 'The brief moment (no month, no year) of self-sustaining majesty collapses at once. The colors deepen and grow small, and Cinderella's finery returns to rags as the mind turns on its own self-adorning "escapades"'.[44] The fiction might fill the 'external regions' or reality with only reflections of our desires, which can be compared to Cinderella's wish-fulfilment owing to its being broken into disillusion. And Stevens is afraid such wish-fulfilment might invite escapism from the reality of death or perishability. This pessimistic idea often haunts Stevens and subdues the tone of his later works, making a contrast with 'the gaiety of language'[45] in his earlier works. Stevens raises an increasing doubt about the capacity of the imagination after the imagination reaches its culmination and loses its creative energy. A strong sense of reality intrudes upon the poet.

Kermode indicates that the seasons are used by Stevens 'not only as a natural analogue to the phases of human life but also as figuring the cyclical nature of the creative imagination'.[46] We may note here that the organisation of The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens reflects the 'cyclical nature of the creative imagination'.

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[43] Vendler denies Bloom's positive reading of the passage in her footnote in On Extended Wings 330n17. Bloom says,

> What the poet comes to believe, in Stevens' late plural of Romantic tradition, is that his disinterested joy in his own creation is more than a final good. In that profoundest of satisfactions, the stance of the creator before his own isolated and splendid artifact, the poet ceases to possess but is, at last in the full difficulty of what it is to be. Most central is that he ceases to have the sense of possessing himself, but is one with that self. In that heroic integration, what is outside the self can be dismissed without fear of solipsistic self-absorption, for the self has joined major man.

Harold Bloom, 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction: A Commentary' in Wallace Stevens: A Collection of Critical Essays 94.

[44] Vendler, On Extended Wings 200.

[45] 'Esthétique du Mal' (*CP*, 322) and 'Adagia' in Opus Posthumous 199.

[46] Kermode 34.

From the spring of Harmonium the imagination develops to flourish in Transport to Summer. After Transport to Summer, in The Auroras of Autumn Stevens's poetic phase comes to the season of autumn, when the poetic imagination has passed its prime and begins to decreate itself. The Romantics are also conscious of the cyclical nature of the imagination. For example, Keats says, 'Four seasons fill the measure of the year; / Four seasons are there in the mind of man'[47] and in 'To Autumn' the harvest image of reaped grain suggests that the poetic imagination is incorporated into art, showing that the relation between the natural process and culture or cultivation is realised in an ideal shape.[48] In Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' the autumnal west wind is represented as the powerful imagination which blows away the dead leaves, driving the 'winged seeds' to 'their dark wintry bed' where they will wait for the spring wind. The complexly optimistic ending, 'O Wind, / If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?' shows the endless activity of the poetic imagination. Stevens's autumn imagination, sharing the same analogue for cyclical process, shows a remodelling of the Romantic in that the fiction, which never satisfies itself for freshness, needs to purge itself and return to the bare reality.

'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven' shares similarities with 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction', but some change in Stevens can be witnessed. As for the title, Stevens's explanation may be helpful:

> . . . here my interest is to try to get as close to the ordinary, the common-place and the ugly as it is possible for a poet to get. It is not a question of grim reality but of plain reality. The object is of course to purge oneself of anything false . . . This is not in any sense a turning away from the ideas of Credences of Summer: it is a development of those

[47] 'Four seasons fill the measure of the year' (1818)

[48] Vendler in The Odes of John Keats points out the harvest images of 'To Autumn' as well as of the autumn sonnet, 'When I have fears that I may cease to be' (1818).

> As the act of conceiving poems is paralleled to natural fruitfulness, his books are the garners into which his grain is gathered. A teeming brain becomes a ripe field; the act of writing is the reaping of that field; to have written all the poems one has been born to write is to have gleaned the full harvest from that teeming brain; and to have compiled one's poems in books is to have stored away riches. (234)

ideas.'[49]

'Credences of Summer' (1947), written after 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction' describes the moment when the marriage of imagination and reality is attained. The power of the summer imagination is guaranteed by its full activity reaching to its zenith. Therefore 'credences' are given to it. The atmosphere of complete fulfilment gives us the celebrating image of the fiction, owing to which reality has significance.

It is the natural tower of all the world,
The point of survey, green's green apogee,
But a tower more precious than the view beyond,
A point of survey squatting like a throne,
Axis of everything, green's apogee

And happiest fold-land, mostly marriage-hymns. (*CP*, 373)

The most prosperous imagination achieves complete equilibrium with reality, which is transformed into a flourishing image of 'green's green apogee'. After this blissful moment the fiction no longer satisfies and the mind turns towards reality. What Stevens chooses as reality is 'the ordinary, the common-place and the ugly' suggesting its bareness without any embellishments. This reminds us of the hero of plainness and the commonplace in 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction'. The fiction created from the quotidian reality might seem to be without a Romantic nature but Wordsworth's phrase, 'A simple produce of the common day' (from his 'Prospectus' to The Recluse) should be remembered. This plain and common reality becomes the poetic space for a new American poetic Romanticism.

'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven' opens with a meditation on the difference between fiction and reality.

The eye's plain version is a thing apart,
The vulgate of experience. Of this,

[49] Stevens, The Letters of Wallace Stevens 636-37.

A few words, an and yet, and yet, and yet –

As part of the never-ending meditation,
Part of the question that is a giant himself:
Of what is this house composed if not of the sun,

These houses, these difficult objects, dilapidate
Appearances of what appearances,
Words, lines, not meanings, not communications,

Dark things without a double, after all,
Unless a second giant kills the first –
A recent imagining of reality, (*CP*, 465)

Though Stevens shows confidence that 'What our eyes behold may well be the text of life but one's meditations on the text and disclosures of these meditations are no less a part of the structure of reality',[50] 'the eye's plain version' or the fiction becomes a thing separated from reality. This 'vulgate of experience' is the same problem as that represented by 'the gibberish of the vulgate' (*CP*, 397) in 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction'. The word 'vulgate' has two slightly contradictory meanings, 'common or colloquial speech' and 'Latin version of the Bible'. The double meaning implies the fiction is described by common words but it sounds unintelligible as if it were written in Latin. This Romantic dilemma has become 'the never-ending meditation' and confronts him like a 'giant' unless a new kind of poetry is created that supersedes the first giant as the second giant: 'Unless a second giant kills the first · / A recent imagining of reality'. As we observed in 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction', this epistemological problem should be solved by the unending round of poetic activity from creating to decreating and back to creating again. Constant re-imagining provides the essential dynamism for Stevens's new Romanticism.

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[50] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 76.

Since, after autumn winter is desired as a pure abstracted reality, the fulfilment of his desire to purge himself of anything false and have the bare icy reality gives us the sense of a dead end of poetic creativity.

> So lewd spring comes from winter's chastity.
> So, after summer, in the autumn air,
> Comes the cold volume of forgotten ghosts,
>
> But soothingly, with pleasant instruments,
> So that this cold, a children's tale of ice,
> Seems like a sheen of heat romanticized. (*CP*, 468)

But reality of winter or purely abstracted reality is not a dead end of poetic creativity but represented as imagined, 'romanticized' like a life-giving medium sending out light and heat since it provides the imagination with a new beginning. Endlessly cyclical change is encouraged: 'Reality is the beginning not the end, / Naked Alpha, not the hierophant Omega, . . . Alpha continues to begin. / Omega is refreshed at every end' (*CP*, 469).

Reaching bare reality can be rephrased as involving the cyclical change of the imagination. However, Stevens's adherence to reality invites a haunting scepticism about imaginative products.

> Inescapable romance, inescapable choice
> Of dreams, disillusion as the last illusion,
> Reality as a thing seen by the mind,
>
> Not that which is but that which is apprehended,
> A mirror, a lake of reflections in a room,
> A glassy ocean lying at the door,
>
> A great town hanging pendent in a shade,
> An enormous nation happy in a style,
> Everything as unreal as real can be,

In the inexquisite eye. (*CP*, 468)

'Reality as a thing seen by the mind' can be interpreted as reality itself or the fiction. However, the fiction which is valued as what verges on verisimilitude is reduced to 'disillusion as the last illusion' when the imagination is defeated by reality or the imaginative world is separated from reality. When the fiction which should be apprehended as substantial, as real, becomes 'as unreal as real can be', the poet must hold 'fast tenaciously in common earth' (*CP*, 468). By repeatedly posing the unbalanced relationship between the imagination and reality, the precarious state of poetry is indicated. Indeed, for Stevens it is necessary to be always conscious of the precarious state; too contented a condition may imply the presence in his poetry of self-regarding solipsism.

The incessant return to the real ('We keep coming back and coming back / To the real' (*CP*, 471)) enables us to make contact with its immediacy. The adherence to reality is essential if the poet is to possess 'poetic truth'.[51]

The poem of pure reality, untouched
By trope or deviation, straight to the word,
Straight to the transfixing object, to the object

At the exactest point at which it is itself,
Transfixing by being purely what it is,
A view of New Haven, say, through the certain eye,

The eye made clear of uncertainty, with the sight
Of simple seeing, without reflection. (*CP*, 471)

The poem's pinpoint accuracy of reality is what Stevens seeks most in his last phase. Though he suffers from the failure of the imagination which colours reality, he suggests, as Vendler indicates, that 'this impotence is perhaps not failure, but a severity of self-demand, as the inquisitor of structures rejects the

[51] Stevens says 'poetic truth is an agreement with reality' in The Necessary Angel 54.

less-than-perfect'.[52]

> The color is almost the color of comedy,
> Not quite. It comes to the point and at the point,
> It fails. The strength at the centre is serious.
>
> Perhaps instead of failing it rejects
> As a serious strength rejects pin-idleness. (*CP*, 477)

The poet fails to represent reality at the very point at which he almost succeeds. And the covering of reality by the imagination assumes a comical appearance. The poet's strong desire for a perfect oneness with nature urges him to be faithful to reality. Urged by the desire, the poet searches for reality, which is 'as momentous as / The search for god' (*CP*, 481).

In 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction' we have already observed the insatiable desire for a new poetic creativity in 'It satisfies / Belief in an immaculate beginning / And sends us, winged by an unconscious will, / To an immaculate end. We move between these points' (*CP*, 382) and 'a will to change' (*CP*, 397). The desire of the mind cannot be satisfied because it cannot possess ever-changing reality. In order to shape a living fiction it is necessary for the poet to possess the desire for an unending round of poetic creativity in the flux of the world. The desire which comes from the 'will to change' becomes the driving force to create a fiction. The strong desire for a new poetic creativity assumes a violent nature. The coda to 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction', as we have seen, shows that the poetic creativity, which goes through the creating and decreating process, entails a battle of the mind. However, the battle of the mind in 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven' assumes a different form in order to emphasise decreation.

> The plainness of plain things is savagery,
> As: the last plainness of a man who has fought
> Against illusion and was, in a great grinding

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[52] Vendler, On Extended Wings 282.

Of growling teeth, and falls at night, snuffed out
By the obese opiates of sleep. (*CP*, 467)

'The plainness of plain things' or abstracted reality is gained through decreation, which is itself a savage activity. Like a ferocious animal which bites to the bone, the poet must remove false conceptions. The image of a feeling of fullness after meals is described as 'the obese opiates of sleep'. We have a similar image in the much earlier 'Earthy Anecdote' where a violent imaginative force acting against reality is embodied in the fictitious 'firecat'. After giving order to reality, the firecat, which is satisfied with the indulgence of the imagination, falls asleep. The satisfaction in the fulfilment of reaching plain reality in 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven' shows that Stevens has a strong sense of reality as predominant over imagination. Therefore the harmony between the two, which has been described as 'amassing' (*CP*, 403) in 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction', turns into a 'savage and subtle and simple harmony' (*CP*, 468), thus showing a subdued tone.

The poet's strong desire to adhere to reality does not preclude the view that the search for reality should be interchangeable with the search for the mind's reality. The boundary between what is real and the mind's reality created out of the former disappears in the construction of a desirable fiction:

. . . It is the philosopher's search

For an interior made exterior
And the poet's search for the same exterior made
Interior: breathless things broodingly abreath

With the inhalations of original cold
And of original earliness. Yet the sense
Of cold and earliness is a daily sense,

Not the predicate of bright origin.
Creation is not renewed by images

Of lone wanderers. To re-create, to use

The cold and earliness and bright origin
Is to search. Likewise to say of the evening star,
The most ancient light in the most ancient sky,

That it is wholly an inner light, that it shines
From the sleepy bosom of the real, re-creates,
Searches a possible for its possibleness. (*CP*, 481)

The poet's search for the 'exterior made / Interior' or the mind's reality reminds us of the phrase, 'He [The poet] must create his unreal out of what is real'.[53] In Kermode's words, the poet 'searches for the "first idea", the abstract "of original cold / And of original earliness", in order to re-create it, exploring the possibleness of a possible, nor of a comforting dream'.[54] The fiction recreated out of bare reality through abstraction has everything including the transformed 'common earth' (*CP*, 468) in the mind: 'We seek / Nothing beyond reality. Within it, / Everything, the spirit's alchemicana / Included' (*CP*, 471). If such a fiction as adheres to reality is realised, a union between imagination and reality is possible: 'If it should be true that reality exists / In the mind . . . / Real and unreal are two in one' (*CP*, 485). Relevant to the subject of the relation between poetry and life is Kermode's following remark:

> "Real and unreal are two in one", because reality exists in the mind; the theory of poetry is the life of poetry, and the theory of poetry is the theory of life[55]; out of its metaphors and its "as-ifs" (the whole poem is full of "as-ifs") are created "The heavens, the hells, the worlds, the longed-for lands".[56]

When the mind is sufficed with the union, we may say that 'the theory / Of

[53] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 58.
[54] Kermode 110.
[55] Stevens, 'Adagia' in Opus Posthumous 202.
[56] Kermode 110-11.

poetry is the theory of life' (*CP*, 486). But when Stevens utters this maxim, he steps away from a definite statement:

> This endlessly elaborating poem
> Displays the theory of poetry,
> As the life of poetry. A more severe,
>
> More harassing master would extemporize
> Subtler, more urgent proof that the theory
> Of poetry is the theory of life,
>
> As it is, in the intricate evasions of as,
> In things seen and unseen, created from nothingness,
> The heavens, the hells, the worlds, the longed-for lands. (*CP*, 486)

Commenting on the use of 'as', O'Neill argues:

> The tricksy slide from 'As it is' to 'the intricate evasions of as' is fundamental to Stevens's 'theory of poetry' and its relation to his 'theory of life'. It is poetry's curse and privilege that in attempting to represent 'life' 'As it is' it will employ 'the intricate evasions of as'. Poetry evades – and searches for value – endlessly, intricately, metaphorically.[57]

What the passage makes clear is that what is imagined cannot be described by exact words but by the 'intricate evasions of as'. O'Neill's view has much in common with that of Bornstein who says that Stevens's poetic fictions 'prevent them from fixing what must never be fixed. Poetry can only exist "in the intricate evasions of as"'.[58] This is also reflected in the mind's image of the real, 'things seen and unseen', the same paradox in 'It must be visible or invisible, / Invisible or visible or both' in 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction' (*CP*, 385). It is also necessary for fiction not to be fixed visually. The co-existence of the paradoxical terms, 'things seen and unseen' shows poetry's necessary falsification as well as flexibility.[59]

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[57] O'Neill, Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem 249

[58] See pp. 240-41, this chapter.

[59] Poetry's necessary falsification is examined in this chapter 233-34.

Stevens says, 'I am evading a definition. If it is defined, it will be fixed and it must not be fixed'.[60] Stevens's rhetorical use of 'as' as well as 'as if' makes the description of the mind's reality unfixed. To keep a tense relationship between imagination and reality, the description of it must not be usurped by definitive words. Haunted by the pressure of reality, the union must not collapse into self-absorbed solipsism. The poet, acknowledging the precarious relation between imagination and reality which the Romantics suffered, employs 'the intricate evasions of as'.

The theme of interdependence between imagination and reality develops in the final phase from a violent relationship to a balance of the two to a position in which reality is allowed dominance over the imagination. Without the adherence to reality fiction as the mind's reality will lose its validity. In 'Angel Surrounded by Paysans' (1949), written in the same year as 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven', how the imagination relates to reality is subtly explored. The poem takes the form of a dialogue between the angel of reality 'seen for a moment standing in the door' and a countryman who glimpses the momentary appearance of the angel. The angel of reality has no celestial appurtenances: 'I have neither ashen wing nor wear of ore / And live without a tepid aureole, / Or stars that follow me' (*CP*, 496). The emphasis is put on his earthly, non-transcendental being, reality itself: 'Yet I am the necessary angel of earth,/ Since, in my sight, you see the earth again,/ Cleared of its stiff and stubborn, man-locked set' (*CP*, 497). In Blessing's words, 'The angel is the "necessary angel" because only he can clear the sight of its "stiff and stubborn, man-locked set"'.[61] What makes reality absolute lies in its pre-existence before us. The poet's announcement of 'the angel of reality' reminds us of the very same words described in the already quoted letter of Stevens in which the necessary angel changes from the angel of the imagination to the angel of reality.[62]

In 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction' we also witnessed the absoluteness of reality. There exists reality underneath all our inventions. Therefore it is through

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[60] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 34.
[61] Blessing 122.
[62] See Chapter 4, 169-70 and this chapter 252-53.

the adherence to reality that the mind's reality can become part of reality, and that the boundary between the two almost disappears, creating a harmonious union. The interdependence between imagination and reality, which has been explored by Stevens, comes to assume a different aspect in his last phase. His strong sense of reality enhances the momentary nature of the union and urges him towards incessant recreation and decreation. This never-ending process is severe enough, even exhausting; however, rare but blissful moments gained through the realisation of the union are correspondingly more valuable. 'Angel Surrounded by Paysans' shows the poet's strong sense of reality as well as the blissful moment.

> . . . Am I not,
> Myself, only half of a figure of a sort,
>
> A figure half seen, or seen for a moment, a man
> Of the mind, an apparition apparelled in
>
> Apparels of such lightest look that a turn
> Of my shoulder and quickly, too quickly, I am gone? (*CP*, 497)

The mind's reality or reality transformed through the imagination unexpectedly assumes a fictive covering which looks like angelic apparel. Vendler, quoting lines from Wordsworth's 'Intimations Ode', 'when meadow, grove, and stream, / The earth, and every common sight, / To me did seem / Apparelled in celestial light', indicates Stevens's rescue of Romanticism:

> Wordsworth's lament for the lost apparel of celestial light is the classic locus of religious nostalgia in English poetry. Stevens announces, by his "apparition apparelled in / Apparels of such lightest look", that form itself, refreshing our vision and changing the drone of life to music, is the true glory of consciousness.[63]

Through the conscious working of the imagination upon reality, the lost apparel of celestial light is recovered.

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[63] Vendler, Voices & Visions 144.

The Rock, the concluding section of The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens, consists of poetical works of his last phase. According to the cyclical change of the imagination, the imagination comes to the season of winter. The scene for the encounter with Stevens's muse in 'Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour' (1950) is laid in a winter's evening.

> Light the first light of evening, as in a room
> In which we rest and, for small reason, think
> The world imagined is the ultimate good.
>
> This is, therefore, the intensest rendezvous.
> It is in that thought that we collect ourselves,
> Out of all the indifferences, into one thing:
>
> Within a single thing, a single shawl
> Wrapped tightly round us, since we are poor, a warmth,
> A light, a power, the miraculous influence. (*CP*, 524)

The opening stanza begins with an imperative sentence as if the poet is performing a religious ceremony, invoking the light. The light of the imagination gives him comfort and security against the surrounding darkness of night. It may not provide him with a world of heaven but it does supply a shelter where he can find himself at home with himself and can think 'the world imagined is the ultimate good'. The phrase, 'for small reason' suggests that there is modesty in Stevens's commitment to the union with his muse. But what Stevens's poetry makes us vividly aware of is that the imagination is still working silently. The closest communion with his muse – 'the intensest rendezvous' – enables the poet to have a feeling of 'an order': 'We feel the obscurity of an order, a whole, / A knowledge, that which arranged the rendezvous' (*CP*, 524). The tentative feeling towards order shown by 'obscurity' and the indefinite article, 'an', gives a subdued tone to the celebratory moment. The 'single shawl' to wrap both the poet and his muse gives us an image of their poor surroundings, suggesting the poverty of the

final moment of bliss in the last phase of the imagination. The comparison between the light of the imagination and that of the candle adds to the sense of poverty. However, this union gives the poet an exquisite bliss, which can be equal to an epiphanic moment in a religious sense: 'God and the imagination are one' (*CP*, 524). Hovering between moderate commitment and a confident sense of oneness, the poet's imagination gradually comes to an end.

Unlike the muse who was walking along the seashore of Key West, singing sonorously, the muse in 'Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour' is represented as static, wrapped in 'a single shawl' with the poet as if they withstand the cold winter together. The last phase never means the death of the imagination; rather it acts as a bridge towards further poetic creativity. 'The Plain Sense of Things' (1952) exemplifies this.

> After the leaves have fallen, we return
> To a plain sense of things. It is as if
> We had come to an end of the imagination,
> Inanimate in an inert savoir. (*CP*, 502)

The 'end of the imagination' gives us the image of the death of the imagination, but the image is cunningly revised by the use of 'as if'. In the poet, who returns to the blank mind of winter, poetic creativity is secretly at work: 'Yet the absence of the imagination had / Itself to be imagined' (*CP*, 503).

> . . . The great pond,
> The plain sense of it, without reflections, leaves,
> Mud, water like dirty glass, expressing silence
>
> Of a sort, silence of a rat come out to see,
> The great pond and its waste of the lilies, all this
> Had to be imagined as an inevitable knowledge,
> Required, as a necessity requires. (*CP*, 503)

Reality without any imagination has to be imagined. The list of abstracted reality – the pond without reflections, mud, water like dirty glass, the waste of the lilies –

shows a bare and ugly reality without any embellishments. The imagery of poverty is quite different from the blank and white world of 'The Snow Man'. The setting of 'The Plain Sense of Things' shows a more severe condition for poetic creation: 'all this / Had to be imagined as an inevitable knowledge'.

In chronological order, 'The Plain Sense of Things' should be put after 'The Rock' (1950). But Stevens put them in reverse order. His deliberate change should be respected. There is a difference in Stevens's abstraction of reality between the plain representation of the wintry scenery in 'The Plain Sense of Things' and the 'barren rock' (*CP*, 527) in 'The Rock'.

The Poem as Icon

It is not enough to cover the rock with leaves.
We must be cured of it by a cure of the ground
Or a cure of ourselves, that is equal to a cure

Of the ground, a cure beyond forgetfulness.
And yet the leaves, if they broke into bud,
If they broke into bloom, if they bore fruit,

And if we ate the incipient colorings
Of their fresh culls might be a cure of the ground.
The fiction of the leaves is the icon

Of the poem, the figuration of blessedness,
And the icon is the man. The pearled chaplet of spring,
The magnum wreath of summer, time's autumn snood,

Its copy of the sun, these cover the rock.
These leaves are the poem, the icon and the man.
These are a cure of the ground and of ourselves,

In the predicate that there is nothing else. (*CP*, 526-27)

A mass of rock suggests the ultimate abstraction that Stevens reaches in his final phase. The image of the 'barren rock' (*CP*, 527) is so mountainous that 'it is not enough to cover the rock with leaves'. This suggests that, owing to its massiveness, invincible reality seems to reject imagination. However, we must create fictive coverings for the rock. It is because the meaning of life depends on poetry. Poetry is increasingly asked to make from reality significance that will satisfy human need: 'the poem makes meanings of the rock,/ Of such mixed motion and such imagery / That its barrenness becomes a thousand things / And so exists no more'. (*CP*, 527). Kermode, quoting 'Poetry is a cure of the mind' from 'Adagia', explains, 'The final cure for the poverty of reality is death . . . and yet the poem might be the cure, too, the new leaves on the rock might medicine us'. In the age of the absence of a belief in God, poetry as a substitute for religion takes shape as an 'icon' in the poem. Kermode continues, 'The poem is ourselves; we cover the rock, fill it with meanings'.[64] The sacredness of poetry is the subject that Stevens has treated repeatedly from his earlier works. And the sacredness is sung by the 'night's hymn of the rock' (*CP*, 528). As the cyclical change of the imagination is condensed from a season to a day and from the day of imagination in full activity to the night of imagination in its sleep, Stevens's poetic creativity declines. But the 'night's hymn' never turns into a requiem since the night's imagination is 'in a vivid sleep' (*CP*, 528), dreaming for its awakening.

In 'The World as Meditation' (1952) the awakening is represented figuratively by Penelope's awakening from her sleep in the presence of Ulysses.

> Is it Ulysses that approaches from the east,
> The interminable adventurer? The trees are mended.
> That winter is washed away. Someone is moving
>
> On the horizon and lifting himself up above it.

[64] Kermode 125.

A form of fire approaches the cretonnes of Penelope,
Whose mere savage presence awakens the world in which she dwells. (*CP*, 520)

Penelope's awakening at dawn in the early spring shows the coming of a new poetic cycle in the imagination. With a presentiment of a new poetic creativity in 'Not Ideas about the Thing But the Thing Itself' (1954) The Rock concludes. At 'the earliest ending of winter', reality is reduced to the purely abstracted reality, from which a new poetic creativity begins.

At the earliest ending of winter,
In March, a scrawny cry from outside
Seemed like a sound in his mind.

He knew that he heard it,
A bird's cry, at daylight or before,
In the early March wind.

The sun was rising at six,
No longer a battered panache above snow . . .
It would have been outside. (*CP*, 534)

The source of the first cry of a newborn poetry cannot be identified: is it from his mind or from the outside? Though this uncertainty seems to be against the message of the title, 'Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself', the working of the mind upon reality is the beginning of creating a fiction as the mind's reality and the boundary between the imagination and reality is disappearing. From the leading sound or the first sound of the word, an overture begins: 'That scrawny cry – it was / A chorister whose c preceded the choir' (*CP*, 534). The new beginning is hymned and celebrated because it gives us a new discovery of reality: 'It was like / A new knowledge of reality' (*CP*, 534). Stevens, by ending his last book, The Rock with this poem, suggests to us that his poetry will never end.

Conclusion

To discuss the development of Stevens's new Romanticism I have made use of the perspective provided by his view of Romanticism, especially his sense of the Romantic imagination's positive and negative aspects. Sharing the Romantic view that through the power of imagination the problem of the dualism between art and existential reality can be solved, Stevens is critical of the failure of the Romantics, ascribed by him to the fact that their achievement 'lies in minor wish-fulfillments and it is incapable of abstraction'.[1] The tense relationship between the imagination and reality, which is also acknowledged by the Romantics, develops into his idea of the 'reality-imagination complex'.

For Stevens it is important to create a new and vital Romanticism as opposed to absorption into Romantic tradition. As Stevens says, 'Modern reality is a reality of decreation'[2]; it is necessary for his poetry to be decreated in order to make possible a new poetic activity. As he declares, 'Then the theatre was changed / To something else. Its past was a souvenir.' ('Of Modern Poetry', *CP*, 239), Stevens, by applying abstraction to his literary mode, creates a poetic space out of a bare reality, purging preconceptions accumulated through literary history. What makes Stevens distinct from the Romantics is that his fiction, created through abstracting and rearranging reality, can become part of reality without any metaphysical vision. Stevens needs a pure poetic space of imaginative creativity, which takes firm root in reality itself.

In his work, the dialectical struggle between the imagination and reality exists within the poem itself; the subject of poetry becomes poetry itself. However, fiction as an imaginative product is always bound up with the incessant conflict between the imagination and reality and the gap between what is imagined and the real. Stevens's endless endeavour to rescue the Romantic imagination is made in creating poetry itself. The solution for the Romantic conflict between imagination

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[1] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 138-39.
[2] Stevens, The Necessary Angel 174-75.

and reality lies in Stevens's new Romanticism. Stevens demands a 'virile' imagination which is energetic enough to survive against oppressive reality. From the loss of freshness in the imagination nothing can be produced but stale modes of perception and thought. The epistemological problem which haunts the Romantics is also experienced by Stevens. With the acknowledgement of the inevitable distortion brought by the cleavage between language and perceived reality, Stevens avoids fixed descriptions of the mind's reality. Therefore Stevens desires 'the exhilarations of changes' ('The Motive for Metaphor', *CP*, 288) of imaginative product.[3]

For Stevens, the progressive metamorphosis of reality through the imagination creates moments of union between what is imagined and what the language implies: 'A fictive covering / Weaves always glistening from the heart and mind' ('Notes toward a Supreme Fiction', *CP*, 396). From the beginning of the creation of poetry out of abstracted reality to the decreation of it and then the beginning of another creation, Stevens's poetic activity is incessantly repeated. By creating a literary mode which corresponds to reality as a continual shaping, the product of the imagination does not become stale.

> The eye's plain version is a thing apart,
> The vulgate of experience. Of this,
> A few words, an and yet, and yet, and yet –
>
> As part of the never-ending meditation,
>
> ('An Ordinary Evening in New Haven', *CP*, 465)

In the final Chapter, quoting the same stanza, I indicated the Romantic dilemma has become 'the never-ending meditation'. In addition to this, to solve the epistemological problem, 'the never-ending meditation' as a literary mode is required. According to his belief in ever-changing reality, the provisionality of poetry becomes the only solution to poetry's various dilemmas, an 'inescapable

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[3] It should be remembered that Stevens regards metaphor as a fictive agent which creates the relation with the changeable reality. See Chapter 3, pp.112-13.

choice' that the poet must make.

Revolving images of the unending round of poetic activity are often witnessed in Stevens's poetry. The 'turning' movement of the leaves in 'Domination of Black' shows the sequence of images revolving. In the ending of 'Le Monocle de Mon Oncle' the turning image again appears in the flight of 'a blue pigeon': 'A blue pigeon it is, that circles the blue sky, / On sidelong wing, around and round and round,' as if the avatar of the imagination flies in circles. In 'The Glass of Water' the rotary motion of the supple weeds in Stevens's source of a new Romanticism shows the unending sequence of images. This develops into the idea of 'repetition', suggesting that imaginative creativity progresses by going 'round, / And round and round, (. . .) merely going round' ('Notes toward a Supreme Fiction', *CP*, 405). Stevens does not merely repeat the act of poetic creation in a negative sense since he desires new poetic creativity. The poet, 'desiring the exhilarations of changes', improvises fiction and avoids the chronic stagnation of the imagination. According to the cyclical nature of creative imagination, Stevens's Collected Poems concludes with the winter's bareness of The Rock. From winter as a figure for purely abstracted reality, a new creative cycle begins. The repeated acts of poetic creation require the energetic activity of the poetic imagination, an activity which is at the heart of Stevens's new Romanticism.

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